

# **Brick Repair Killeen TX: Military-Town Brick Homes and Their Repairs**

What PCS Families Inherit in Killeen and Copperas Cove —  
and the Pre-Sale Fixes That Pay Back at Closing

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## **Chapter 1: Brick Repair Killeen TX — The House the Last Family Left You**

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Every house in Killeen and Copperas Cove has a story, and most of those stories start the same way: a family got orders. They had ninety days to sell or ninety days to find a place, a deployment in the middle of it, kids changing schools, a household-goods shipment that may or may not arrive on time. Somewhere in all of that, the chimney didn't get repointed. The lintel didn't get painted. The mailbox kept leaning. And now the house is yours.

I've worked brick around Fort Hood for decades, and I want to be straight with you about what that means for your walls. A military town's housing stock doesn't age the way a civilian town's does. In a civilian neighborhood, a family lives in a house for fifteen years and the maintenance happens gradually — a repair here, a project there, spread across a decade and a half. In a military town, families rotate every two to three years. Nobody repoints a chimney when they're PCS-bound in ninety days. Nobody rebuilds a mailbox with a deployment next month. So the maintenance doesn't happen

gradually. It accumulates. Each family leaves a layer of "I'll get to it" behind, and after four or five rotations, the house is wearing twenty years of deferred maintenance on thirty-year-old brick.

This isn't a criticism of military families. It's the opposite. The families I meet around this post are managing more simultaneous stress than most people will ever understand — moves, deployments, separations, kids starting over — and the fact that the chimney flashing didn't make the priority list is completely reasonable. My job in this book is to help you read what you inherited, fix it in the right order, and — if you're the one getting orders next — leave the house better than you found it in the ways that actually pay back at closing.

This book covers Killeen and Copperas Cove specifically: the brick ranchers built for GIs in the 1950s, the 1970s and '80s subdivisions that make up the bulk of both towns, the newer builds spreading west, and the particular way all of them sit on Central Texas clay. We'll talk about what to inspect in your first thirty days, the repairs that matter most, what honest 2026 pricing looks like, and how to hire the work on a PCS timeline. And we'll do it with the respect your family's service

has earned — no sales pitch, no scare tactics, just straight talk from a man who's spent fifty years in Texas brick.

One local note before we start: the post down the road is Fort Hood again — officially restored in July 2025, now honoring Col. Robert B. Hood. Around here it never stopped being Fort Hood. This book uses the name the town uses.

## Chapter 2: Why Military Towns Age Their Brick Faster

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Let me show you the math, because once you see it, you'll read every house in Killeen differently.

Take a brick home built in 1985 in Copperas Cove — a solid little rancher, brick veneer on slab, the kind of house that makes up the backbone of this town. In a civilian market, that house might have had three owners in forty years. Each one lived there long enough to notice the chimney mortar going soft, hire a mason, and move on. The maintenance happened in rhythm with the aging.

In a military town, that same house has had eight, ten, twelve occupants. Some owned, some rented. The average stay: two to three years. Here's what doesn't happen in a two-to-three-year stay: nobody schedules a \$1,200 chimney repoint in year two of a three-year tour. Nobody budgets for lintel maintenance on a house they'll sell before the next duty station. The rational decision for every single family, every single rotation, is to defer — and every one of those rational decisions was correct for that family at that time. But the

house keeps the tab.

Multiply that across a neighborhood and you get the signature look of a military town's older brick: chimneys with mortar that's twenty years past its service life, lintels with rust you can see from the street, mailboxes at angles that defy geometry, and sprinkler heads that have been spraying the same wall since the first Bush administration. Killeen's own planning documents note that roughly 36 percent of the city's housing stock was built before 1980 — that's a deep bench of houses old enough to need real masonry maintenance, occupied on short rotations by families with every reason to spend their money elsewhere.

The rental layer makes it sharper. Killeen runs about half renters — one of the highest rental shares in Central Texas — and a lot of those rentals are owned by military landlords who bought on a VA loan, got orders, and kept the house as an investment. Nothing wrong with that; it's smart. But a rental property's maintenance standard is "keep it rentable," not "keep it right," and brickwork is the easiest thing in the world to defer on a rental. Mortar doesn't complain. It just quietly powders for a decade until somebody's home inspector writes it up.

So here's the reframe I want you to carry through this book: when you find deferred brick maintenance in a Killeen or Copperas Cove house, you're not looking at neglect. You're looking at arithmetic. Ten families, ten sets of orders, ten correct short-term decisions. Your job now is to be the owner who breaks the cycle — not by fixing everything at once, but by fixing the right things in the right order. That's what the rest of this book is for.

## Chapter 3: Killeen's Housing Stock — What the Eras Tell You

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Killeen grew up with the post, and the housing stock reads like a deployment history. Knowing which era your house comes from tells you what kind of brickwork you're living with.

**The early ring — 1940s through 1960s.** Killeen's oldest neighborhoods, built when the post was young and growing fast. Small brick ranchers and bungalows, modest and solid. If your house is from this era, the brick is likely original and the mortar is well past its service life — forty, fifty, sixty years on joints designed for twenty to thirty. These houses are also where you find the most "creative" past repairs: a tube of caulk where mortar should be, a smear of stucco over spalled brick, a chimney patched by somebody's brother-in-law in 1997. Read the walls carefully. The bones are usually good — they built these houses to last — but the maintenance history is anybody's guess.

**The middle ring — 1970s through 1990s.** This is the bulk of Killeen: subdivision after subdivision of brick veneer

ranchers on slab foundations, built during the post's big growth decades. Standard Texas construction — single wythe of brick over wood frame, Type N mortar, slab on black clay. The brick is modern and hard, which is good news, but the mortar on the 1970s and '80s houses is now thirty to fifty years old — at or past the end of its life. This is the ring where chimney repointing is most overdue and where you'll find the classic corridor pattern: weather-side mortar powdering while the north wall still looks fine. If your Killeen house was built between 1975 and 1995 and the chimney has never been repointed, put it at the top of your list.

**The new ring — 2000s to today.** Savannah Heights, the newer sections bordering Harker Heights, the builds spreading along the corridors — these houses have young mortar and the problems, when they appear, are installation defects rather than age: weep holes painted shut, flashing done fast, mortar droppings in the wall cavity, lintels installed bare. A chimney leak in a 2015 Killeen house is almost never failed mortar; it's failed flashing or a bad crown. Different diagnosis, different fix.

**Harker Heights and Nolanville,** just east, run newer on average — a lot of 1990s to 2010s brick, bigger lots, and the

same clay underneath. If you're house-hunting across the whole Fort Hood area, the pattern holds: the closer to the gate and the older the neighborhood, the more deferred maintenance baked into the brick. Price reflects it — Killeen's median sold price sits well below Belton's or Harker Heights' — and a sharp buyer reads the brickwork as part of the true cost of the house.

## Chapter 4: Copperas Cove — The Town the Post Built

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Copperas Cove is the most military town in the corridor that isn't actually on the post. The town essentially exists because of Fort Hood — founded just after World War II, built out as affordable housing for GIs, and growing in waves with every expansion of the base. The housing stock tells that story plainly.

**The GI ranches — 1950s.** The oldest Cove neighborhoods hold small ranch-style houses built as affordable housing for soldiers — modest brick and frame ranchers on generous lots. These are seventy-year-old houses now. The ones that have been loved are gems — solid bones, mature trees, real character. The ones that have been rentals for twenty years straight are where you'll find the deepest deferred maintenance in the corridor: original chimneys never touched, mortar original to the Eisenhower administration, every lintel rusting. If you're buying one of these, budget for masonry the way you'd budget for a roof — it's a when, not an if.

**The 1970s through 1990s subdivisions.** About forty percent of Copperas Cove's housing went up between 1970 and 1989, with another big wave from 2000 on. These are the brick ranchers that define the town — three and four bedrooms, single-story, brick veneer on slab. The 1970s and '80s houses are now in the full repointing window. The 1990s houses are entering it. This is also where you find the highest concentration of former military rentals, which means the widest variance in condition: two identical houses on the same street, one maintained by an owner for twenty years, one cycled through tenants for twenty years. The brick will tell you which is which before you ever go inside.

**The new westward sprawl.** Newer subdivisions pushing west onto subdivided farmland — contemporary floor plans, brick and stone exteriors, bigger lots, Hill Country terrain starting to show. Young houses, young mortar. Watch for builder-grade shortcuts the way you would anywhere: flashing, weep holes, unprimed lintels.

**The land itself.** Cove sits where the Blackland Prairie starts giving way to Hill Country — the terrain rolls more than Killeen's, and the soil varies more lot to lot. Some streets sit on the classic black clay; others have rockier, better-draining

ground. That variance means you can't assume your neighbor's foundation experience predicts yours. Read your own walls, on your own lot. House Creek runs through the southwestern part of town, and lots near the creek bottoms deal with wetter soil and more moisture cycling — harder on mortar, harder on foundations.

The town's median home price sits well below the state average, which is exactly why so many military families plant their flag here — a reasonable budget goes a long way in the Cove. Just make sure part of that budget is earmarked for the brick. The affordable house with a failing chimney isn't affordable; it's a house with a chimney bill attached.

## Chapter 5: The Inheritance Inspection — Your First Thirty Days

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You just got the keys — bought on a VA loan with zero down, or signed a lease, or moved the family in while the boxes are still stacked in the garage. Before life swallows you, spend one weekend reading the brick. This inspection costs nothing and it will save you from every surprise this book describes.

**Day one: the chimney.** Binoculars, from the ground. You're looking for mortar joints that have receded back from the brick face, crumbling edges, and white staining running down the brick — efflorescence, the mineral trails that mean water is moving through the masonry. Check the crown, the cap on top: cracks in the crown mean water goes straight down the flue chase. If the inspection report said "deteriorated mortar at chimney" — and in this town, it often does — believe it. The chimney is the canary. Its condition tells you where the whole house stands.

**Day two: walk the walls.** South and west sides first — sun and weather kill mortar youngest there. Take a flat screwdriver and drag it firmly across the mortar joints in a

dozen spots per wall. Sound mortar resists the blade. Failed mortar powders, flakes, or scoops out. Note which walls fail and roughly how much — that's your scope if you ever hire the work. While you're walking, look above every window and door for the horizontal crack in the mortar joint just above the opening, and for rust staining bleeding through. That's the lintel — the steel angle iron carrying the brick over every opening — and in this town it's almost always rusting. Note which openings show it.

**Day three: the water audit.** Walk the house in a rain, or run the sprinklers and watch. Where do the downspouts discharge? Any dumping within a few feet of the foundation gets flagged. Where does water pond against the slab? Flag it. Which sprinkler heads spray the brick walls? Every one of those is fast-forwarding the mortar's aging — flag them for redirection, which costs nothing. Check that mulch and soil sit below the weep holes along the base of the brick — buried weep holes are failed weep holes.

**Day four: the cracks.** Look for the stair-step pattern — cracks zigzagging through mortar joints, usually stepping down from the eaves at the corners. Most are the soil's normal breathing and the veneer's normal response:

cosmetic, repointable, not scary. What elevates a crack to a phone call: width over a quarter inch, cracks running through bricks instead of just mortar, horizontal cracks, one side of the crack sitting higher than the other, or cracks that are visibly growing. Mark any crack with a dated pencil line across it and check monthly. Stable is history. Growing is a professional evaluation — and note this carefully: growing cracks mean the foundation gets evaluated before the mason gets called. Repointing a moving wall is money thrown at a moving target.

**Day five: the mailbox and the details.** Plumb or leaning? In this soil, leaning is the norm by year ten — note the direction, which tells you about soil movement on that side of the lot. Check the address numbers, the mortar condition, whether the box itself is sound. It's the smallest job on this list and the most visible.

Write it all down. Photograph everything. If you're buying, this is your maintenance roadmap. If you're renting, this is your move-in documentation — date-stamped photos of pre-existing brick condition protect your deposit and your good name. If you're selling next PCS season, this is the beginning of your pre-listing punch list.

## Chapter 6: Chimney Repair Killeen — The Canary You Can't Ignore

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In the Fort Hood area, more masonry service calls are about chimneys than everything else combined. There's a reason, and it's not mysterious: the chimney is the most exposed masonry on the house, and in a town where the average owner stays three years, it's the most deferred. Those two facts multiply.

The chimney lives the hardest life on the property. No eaves, sun on all four sides, horizontal rain in a spring storm, the occasional hard freeze, and heat cycling from the inside every time the fireplace runs. Mortar joints on a chimney fail years before the mortar on the walls — on a 1990 Killeen house with original everything, the chimney mortar is often twenty years past done while the walls are merely due. And because nobody repoints a chimney in the last year of a tour, the failure compounds across rotations until somebody — you — inherits the full bill.

Here's what the work costs in 2026, with honest ranges. Chimney tuckpointing and repointing — cutting out the failed

mortar and packing in new matched mortar — typically runs \$500 to \$2,500 for a standard project, averaging around \$1,200 nationally, at \$10 to \$25 per square foot. Most Killeen and Copperas Cove chimneys are one to two stories with straightforward roof access, which puts them in the middle of that range — expect roughly \$800 to \$1,600 for a standard repoint. Scaffolding or steep-roof access adds \$200 to \$600. Small repairs can be as little as \$300.

But the repoint is only part of the chimney story, and this is where inherited deferred maintenance bites. While the mason is up there, three other things need eyes: the crown, the flashing, and the flue. A cracked crown — the concrete or mortar cap on top — lets water straight down the flue chase, and no amount of repointing fixes a leak that's coming through the crown. Failed flashing where the chimney meets the roof is, in my experience, the actual culprit in half of all "chimney leaks" — the mortar's fine, but the metal has pulled away or corroded. These are separate repairs with separate prices; get them itemized, not folded into a mystery number.

The deployment-family special case: if you're buying and the inspection flags the chimney, don't let it ride. Water entering a chimney doesn't pause for your timeline — every rainy

season it gets worse, and the price curve from "repoint" to "rebuild" is steep. A repoint now is a maintenance bill. A rebuild later is a project. If you're selling, the chimney is the highest-visibility masonry on the house — it's in every exterior photo, it's the first thing the inspector photographs, and "deteriorated chimney mortar" in an inspection report costs you multiples of the repair in negotiation. Fix it before you list.

One more thing, and I say this with respect for every family that's ever had to choose: I know the chimney competes with a hundred other demands on a military family's budget. I'm not telling you to fix everything. I'm telling you to fix this first, because water doesn't negotiate and the chimney is where water gets in.

## **Chapter 7: The Rental Years — What Landlords Defer and How Buyers Read It**

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A large share of Killeen's brick homes have spent years — sometimes decades — as rentals, many owned by military landlords who bought on a VA loan, got orders, and kept the house. If you're buying one of these houses, you need to understand the rental maintenance standard, because it explains everything you're seeing in the brickwork.

The rental standard is "keep it rentable." That's not an insult — it's economics. A landlord three states away, managing through a property manager, maintains to the level that keeps the house occupied and the repair calls down. Brickwork almost never generates a repair call. Tenants don't call about powdering mortar. They call about the AC, the plumbing, the appliances. So the brick gets nothing, year after year, and the property manager — who is not a mason — never flags it.

What this produces, specifically, in brick: chimneys that haven't been touched in fifteen years. Lintel rust painted over instead of treated — a coat of paint over active rust, which

looks fine for a year and then bubbles right back through. Mortar joints "repaired" with caulk, which is not a repair but a postponement with a timer on it. Sprinkler heads spraying the walls since installation, because nobody ever walked the property with that in mind. Weep holes buried under years of mulch top-dressing. And the classic: a quick cosmetic flip before listing — fresh paint on everything paintable, new mulch, staged furniture — over brickwork that's quietly failing underneath.

If you're the buyer, here's how to read it. Look past the flip. The lipstick doesn't change the brick. Do the screwdriver test on the weather walls — flippers don't repoint, and the mortar will tell you the truth in ten seconds. Look above the garage door for the painted-over rust line — paint over rust has a distinctive bubbled texture up close. Check the chimney with binoculars regardless of how fresh the exterior paint looks. And read the seller's disclosure with the rental history in mind: "unknown" on maintenance questions from an out-of-state owner isn't evasion, it's usually the truth — they genuinely don't know, because nobody was watching the brick.

If you're the landlord — and I mean this with full respect for

the military families building wealth this way — put the brick on a schedule. Not a big schedule. Every turnover, walk the property with the checklist from Chapter 5: chimney glance, screwdriver test on two walls, lintel look, sprinkler check, weep hole check. Fifteen minutes. Catch the chimney at "needs repointing" instead of "needs rebuilding" and you've saved yourself thousands. The landlords who do this have properties that appraise better, sell faster, and don't blow up inspections. The ones who don't are the reason the next buyer needs this book.

And a note on painted brick, because flips love it: painting brick veneer is a one-way door. Once it's painted, it's painted forever — the maintenance cycle becomes the paint's cycle, and moisture management changes completely. If you're buying a painted-brick house, understand you're buying the paint job's future, not just the brick's past. If you're a landlord considering painting to freshen a rental: don't do it to hide failing mortar. Fix the mortar first, then decide about paint with a clear conscience.

## Chapter 8: Brick Tuckpointing Killeen — Cracks, Clay, and Reading the Walls

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The ground under Killeen and Copperas Cove is the same black clay you'll find across the Blackland Prairie — expansive stuff that swells when wet and shrinks when dry, moving your slab foundation through a slow annual cycle. Your brick veneer, which is really a single layer of brick hung on the frame, rides along. And because brick doesn't stretch, the mortar joints absorb the movement — which is exactly what they're designed to do. Mortar is the sacrificial element. It's supposed to give so the brick doesn't crack.

So when you see stair-step cracks zigzagging through the mortar joints — the classic pattern, stepping down from the eaves at the corners of the house — you're looking at the system working as designed. The soil moved, the mortar gave, the brick survived. Most of these cracks are cosmetic. They're also the number-one source of unnecessary panic in Fort Hood area real estate, so let's get precise about reading them — especially if you're buying.

**As a buyer reading cracks:** hairline to an eighth of an inch,

stable, in the mortar joints only — that's normal soil breathing, and it's a maintenance item, not a dealbreaker. It tells you the house needs repointing in those areas, which is a negotiating point, not a walk-away. What changes the reading: cracks wider than a quarter inch, cracks running through the bricks themselves (the wall took a hit bigger than the mortar could absorb), horizontal cracking, displacement where one side of the crack sits higher or prouder than the other, or cracks paired with interior symptoms — sticking doors, sloping floors, drywall cracks in the same area. That combination means the foundation is part of the story, and the foundation gets evaluated by a foundation specialist before anyone talks about tuckpointing. Get the order right: structure first, masonry second. Brick tuckpointing in Killeen on a wall that's still moving is gluing a hinge — it'll crack right back open.

**The monitoring method:** for any crack that worries you but doesn't clearly demand a professional, mark it. A dated pencil line across the crack, or a two-dollar crack monitor from the hardware store. Check monthly for a season. In Central Texas, check across a wet-dry cycle — a crack that opens in the August drought and closes in the spring rains is the clay breathing, and it's telling you the movement is seasonal and

normal. A crack that only ever gets wider is telling you something else.

**What tuckpointing costs here:** \$10 to \$25 per square foot for residential repointing work, with straightforward ground-level veneer at the lower end. A defined section — an 8-by-10 wall, say — runs \$400 to \$2,000 depending on access and how much joint is actually failed. Make the mason measure the failed square footage and write it down; partial repointing of what's actually deteriorated is the honest job, and any contractor who quotes the whole house when only the weather walls are powdering is selling, not diagnosing.

**The soil-management side:** you can't change the clay, but you can calm it. Consistent moisture around the foundation — soaker hoses in drought, even all the way around, not just the visible side — keeps the shrink-swell cycle shallow. Downspout extensions carry roof water away from the slab instead of feeding one corner. Redirecting sprinklers off the walls stops the daily wet-dry hammering that ages mortar in fast-forward. None of this is masonry work, and all of it determines how long the masonry work lasts. Do the water work first.

## Chapter 9: Pre-Sale Fixes That Pay Back at Closing

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Orders came. You're listing the house. You've got a window — maybe sixty days, maybe ninety — and a budget that's already stretched by the move itself. Here's how to spend the masonry dollars where they actually come back at closing.

Understand what you're buying with pre-sale repairs: you're not buying brickwork, you're buying a clean inspection report. In the Fort Hood area, a huge share of buyers are using VA loans, and VA appraisals and inspections don't mess around — the appraiser photographs the exterior, notes deteriorated masonry, and flags anything that looks like deferred maintenance affecting value or safety. Every item in that report becomes a negotiation. And here's the thing about masonry line items: they photograph terribly and scare buyers disproportionately. "Deteriorated mortar at chimney" reads to a buyer — especially a young family already nervous about the purchase — like the whole house is falling apart. The actual repair might be a straightforward repoint. The negotiation discount the buyer demands will be three times

the repair cost. Fix it before the photographer shows up.

**The priority list, in order of return:**

**One: the chimney.** If the mortar's visibly deteriorated, repoint it. It's the most-photographed masonry on the house, the first thing the inspector flags, and the repair with the steepest penalty for deferral — every buyer reads chimney problems as expensive, whether they are or not. A standard chimney repoint in this market runs \$500 to \$2,500, averaging around \$1,200. That \$1,200 can easily save you five figures in negotiation. It's the highest-return exterior fix in this book.

**Two: the mailbox.** A leaning mailbox is in the listing photos — it's literally the first masonry the buyer sees, at the curb. A plumb mailbox with clean mortar joints signals a maintained house before anyone steps out of the car. Rebuild it plumb on a proper footing if it's leaning; it's one of the more affordable masonry jobs and the curb-appeal return is immediate.

**Three: the lintel lines.** Rust staining bleeding down from above the garage door or windows reads as neglect in photos. Cleaning, treating, priming, and painting the lintels — plus repointing the cracked joints above them — is modest work

that makes the whole facade look cared for. It's the kind of detail that separates "maintained" from "flipped" in a buyer's mind.

**Four: the weather walls.** If the south and west walls have visibly powdering mortar, a partial repoint of the failed areas cleans up the listing photos enormously. You don't need the whole house — you need the walls the photographer shoots.

**What not to do before selling:** don't start a whole-house repointing project on a PCS timeline. It's days to weeks of scaffolding, dust, and disruption, and you won't be there to enjoy it. Don't paint the brick to hide problems — inspectors and appraisers see through it, and you've just converted a maintenance item into a disclosure question. And don't pour money into masonry the buyer can't see — the back wall nobody photographs can wait for the next owner.

**Timing it:** get the mason out the week you decide to list, not the week before photos. Good masons in this market book out — the ones worth hiring are busy — and mortar needs cure time before it photographs at its true color. Two to three weeks of lead time is the minimum. If orders drop suddenly and you're out of time, get the chimney at least — it's the one that costs you most to skip.

## Chapter 10: Lintels, Garage Doors, and the Rust Nobody Paints

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Every opening in your brick veneer — the garage door, the front door, every window — is spanned by a steel angle iron called a lintel. It carries the brick above the opening. And across Killeen and Copperas Cove, on house after house, that steel is rusting.

The mechanism is simple and worth understanding: steel rusts, rust occupies several times the volume of the steel it replaces, and that expansion pushes upward against the brick courses sitting on the lintel. First sign: a horizontal crack in the mortar joint just above the garage door. Then rust staining bleeding down through the mortar. Left alone for years — and in a town of three-year rotations, "left alone for years" is the default — the expanding rust jacks the brick courses apart, cracks bricks, and pushes the veneer outward over the opening. What started as a maintenance item becomes a wall rebuild.

Why is it so universal here? Because builders install lintels bare or with a token coat of paint, and then the ownership

carousel starts. Nobody in a three-year stay thinks about the steel above the garage door. Four rotations later, the rust has had a decade to work. When I walk Killeen subdivisions from the '80s and '90s, I can read the lintel history of a street like rings on a tree.

The fix, in order of escalation: **maintenance** — wire-brush or grind the rust, treat with rust converter, prime with a real metal primer, topcoat. Do this every several years and the lintel outlives the house. **Repair** — where the rust has pitted the steel or pushed the brick, the disturbed courses get repointed or partially rebuilt after the steel is treated. **Replacement** — where the steel is too far gone, the brick above comes off, a new properly-primed lintel goes in, and the courses go back. Each step costs more than the last, which is the entire argument for catching it early.

For the PCS seller, lintel work is pure pre-listing gold: it's cheap relative to its visual impact, it's fast, and "no rust staining, lintels maintained" is a line in the inspection report that buys buyer confidence. For the buyer, rust staining above the garage door is a negotiating point and a first-year maintenance item — not a reason to walk away, but not something to ignore either. For the landlord, it's a turnover

checklist line: glance at the lintels every time the property turns. Ten seconds per opening.

Walk your lintels once a year. Spring is fine. Look above every opening, look for the horizontal crack and the rust bleed. The lintel is talking to you. Listen early and it's a paint job. Listen late and it's a project.

## Chapter 11: Water — Gutters, Grade, and Sprinklers on a Deployment Schedule

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Here's the chapter for the family managing a house around deployments, training rotations, and everything else the Army schedules without consulting your maintenance calendar. The water work — gutters, grading, sprinklers, foundation moisture — is the highest-leverage maintenance on a Central Texas brick home, and almost all of it can be set up once and then run itself while you're gone.

**The principle:** the black clay under your slab expands when wet and shrinks when dry. Every gallon of water you misplace around your foundation feeds the cycle that cracks your mortar. Every gallon you manage well calms it. You're not fighting the soil — you're managing its moisture, and moisture management is mostly plumbing and landscaping, not masonry.

**Gutters first.** Clean them twice a year — spring and fall. Overflowing gutters dump roof water exactly where it does the most damage: behind the brick, at the foundation line, onto the lintels. If you're deploying, get them cleaned before

you go and have someone lined up for while you're gone. A \$150 gutter cleaning beats a \$1,500 masonry repair every time.

**Downspout extensions.** Walk the house in a rain — or have someone do it — and watch every downspout. Any discharge within a few feet of the foundation gets a ten-dollar extension carrying the water ten feet out. The roof-valley corners, where two slopes concentrate water in one spot, are the worst offenders. This is the single cheapest structural-protection work on the house.

**Grade.** The ground must slope away from the slab in every direction. Low spots that pond against the foundation get filled — shovel work. Flower beds get special attention: mounded mulch against the brick holds moisture against the wall and buries the weep holes, those little gaps at the base of the brick that let the wall cavity drain. Keep soil and mulch below the weep holes, always.

**Sprinklers.** Walk the system and find every head that sprays the brick walls. Each one is running a daily wet-dry cycle on that section of mortar — fast-forward aging. Redirect them; it's free and takes minutes. Then check the system's overall pattern: is it keeping one side of the foundation soggy while

the other bakes? Uneven moisture is differential settlement waiting to happen. Set the system for even coverage and leave the walls alone.

**Foundation watering in drought.** The August special. When the clay shrinks and pulls away from the slab — you can sometimes see the gap — a soaker hose run a foot out from the foundation, on a timer, keeps the soil consistently moist. The operative words are consistent and even: all the way around the house. Uneven watering creates the differential movement you're trying to prevent. Set it on a timer, check it weekly, and it runs itself through the deployment.

**The deployment handoff.** If you're leaving the house — to a deployment, to a new station with the house rented behind you — write the water stuff down for whoever's watching the property. Where the soaker hose timer is. Who cleans the gutters. Which sprinkler zone not to crank up. The houses that survive deployments best aren't the ones with the toughest brick; they're the ones whose water kept getting managed while the family was gone.

## Chapter 12: Hiring Right Near the Post — The Fort Hood Area Rules

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You need a mason. Maybe the inspection flagged the chimney, maybe you're prepping to list, maybe you just did the Chapter 5 walk and the screwdriver told you the truth. Here's how to hire well in the Killeen–Copperas Cove market — including on a PCS timeline, which changes the rules.

**Get three bids.** In this market, three bids show you the real range. Interview the middle — and "interview" means asking specific questions and listening for specific answers. "We'll cut the failed joints to a full inch, Type N mortar, test batch for color, ladders and roof jacks on the chimney elevation, tarps on the landscaping, two days" is a mason talking. "We'll take care of it, don't worry" is a warning. The bid should list scope in square feet, cut depth, mortar type and matching method, access plan, protection and cleanup, schedule, price, payment terms, and warranty — in writing.

**Hire somebody who knows this soil and this stock.** A mason who's worked the Fort Hood area for years knows the black clay, knows which Killeen subdivisions have the soft

brick, knows that a 1950s Copperas Cove rancher might have mortar that needs a softer touch, knows how to schedule around a Central Texas summer so the mortar cures instead of flash-drying in 105 degrees. Ask where he's worked. Local knowledge is worth money on this job.

**The PCS-timeline rules.** If you're working against orders, say so upfront — a good contractor will tell you honestly whether the job fits your window, including cure time. Mortar needs to cure before it can be painted or before it photographs true; don't schedule the mason for the week of listing photos. Get the work done early in your listing prep, not late. And be wary of anyone who promises a whole-house repoint in two days on a PCS crunch — speed is the enemy of mortar work. The jobs that fit a short timeline: chimney repoint, lintel maintenance, mailbox rebuild, partial wall repointing. The job that doesn't: whole-house envelope work. Save that for the next owner's decade.

**The gate-area caution.** Military towns attract traveling crews — after hail season especially — offering cheap exterior work to neighborhoods full of young families. Some are legitimate. Many are gone before the warranty matters. If one bid is dramatically lower than the two local bids, ask

who's honoring the workmanship warranty in eighteen months. Then ask for two local addresses you can drive by — not photos, addresses — and actually drive by. In towns this size, a good mason's work is all over the streets, and neighbors talk.

**Money rules.** A deposit for materials is normal. The balance on completion, after you walk the finished work, is the rule. Never pay in full upfront — not cash, not check, not an app. A real workmanship warranty on repointing runs two to five years; "lifetime warranty on mortar" is a sales line, because mortar is a wearing material and the clay underneath is still moving. Get the warranty term and the exclusions in writing, on the contract.

If you want a straight bid from people who work the Fort Hood area every week, that's what we do — [brick repair in Killeen](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) and across the corridor is our home ground. And if you want to keep learning before you call anybody, my [free brick repair books](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>) cover the rest of what your walls are trying to tell you.

## Chapter 13: For the Landlord — Protecting Your Investment Property's Brick

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A lot of Killeen and Copperas Cove rentals are owned by service members and veterans who bought on a VA loan — zero down, no PMI — lived in the house for a tour, got orders, and kept it as an investment. If that's you, this chapter is about protecting that investment's brickwork across distance and property managers, because the math is strongly in your favor if you do and quietly against you if you don't.

**The economics.** A rental's brickwork fails the same way an owner-occupied house's does — same clay, same sun, same mortar service life — but nobody's watching it. The property manager isn't a mason and isn't paid to think about mortar. The tenants aren't going to call about powdering joints. So the deterioration runs silent until it becomes a capital expense: the chimney that needed a \$1,200 repoint five years ago now needs a \$5,000 rebuild, and it's coming out of your cash flow all at once. Preventive masonry maintenance on a rental isn't spending — it's the cheapest capital-expenditure insurance you can buy.

**The turnover protocol.** Every time the property turns — and in a military town, that's every two to three years — somebody walks the brick. Not a mason; you, the manager, a trusted friend, whoever. Fifteen minutes with the Chapter 5 checklist: chimney glance with binoculars, screwdriver test on the south and west walls, lintel look above the garage and windows, sprinkler heads off the walls, weep holes clear of mulch, mailbox plumb. Photograph everything, date-stamp it, file it with the turnover paperwork. This does three things: it catches problems at the maintenance stage instead of the rebuild stage, it documents pre-existing condition against tenant damage claims, and it builds the maintenance history that makes the house sell faster and appraise better when you eventually list.

**The big three for rentals.** Chimney, lintels, water. The chimney because it's the canary and the most expensive thing to defer. The lintels because rust never sleeps and tenants never report it. The water — gutters, downspouts, sprinklers, grade — because it's free to manage and catastrophic to ignore, and it's the thing most likely to go unmanaged across a property manager change. Put the gutter cleaning on a recurring schedule with a vendor, not on anyone's memory. Put the sprinkler-redirect in the turnover checklist. These are

systems, not favors.

**When you list it.** A rental with a documented brick maintenance history is a unicorn in this market — and buyers' agents notice. "Chimney repointed 2024, lintels serviced 2025" in the listing, with receipts, answers the VA appraiser's questions before they're asked and short-circuits the inspection negotiation. The landlords who maintain the brick don't just spend less over the hold period; they sell faster and closer to asking. In a town where half the listings are former rentals with mystery maintenance, documented care is a genuine competitive edge.

**One caution:** don't let a property manager hire masonry work unsupervised on price alone. The cheapest bid on a rental is how you get caulk in the joints and paint over rust. Either approve the contractor yourself using the Chapter 12 rules, or give the manager a pre-approved mason and a standing instruction: no brickwork without your sign-off. Your house, your asset, your call.

## Chapter 14: The Deployment-Proof

### Maintenance Calendar

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Military life doesn't run on a homeowner's maintenance calendar — it runs on orders, rotations, and deployments. So here's the brick maintenance year, rewritten for a Fort Hood area family: the minimum effective schedule, designed to survive the months when you're not there to think about it.

**Spring — March through May.** The prime masonry season in Central Texas: moderate temperatures, mortar cures right, and every good mason is booking up. This is when you schedule any repointing or chimney work — book a month out. Do the annual walk: chimney, walls, lintels, cracks, mailbox, the full Chapter 5 inspection. Clean the gutters after the spring storms. Redirect any sprinkler heads hitting the walls before the irrigation season starts. If you're listing this PCS season, this is when the pre-sale work happens — Chapter 9's priority list, done early enough to cure before photos.

**Summer — June through August.** Drought management. If the clay is shrinking away from the slab, run the soaker hoses

— even, all the way around, on a timer. Check them weekly; a timer that failed in July is how you get differential settlement in August. This is the worst season for scheduling mortar work — fresh mortar in 105-degree heat flash-dries and cures weak — so if masonry has to happen now, hire the mason who talks about heat management without being asked: early-morning work, shaded materials, misting, the right admixtures. If you're deploying in summer, set the water systems, hand the checklist to whoever's watching the house, and go. The house will be fine if the water's managed.

**Fall — September through November.** The second prime masonry season. Any work you deferred from spring happens now, before the holidays and before winter. Clean the gutters again after the leaves. Walk the lintels — a year of summer heat cycling is when rust shows its progress. Check the crack marks you set in spring: did anything move through the summer drought? If you're PCSing in winter or spring, fall is when the pre-listing masonry assessment happens, so the work can be scheduled without panic.

**Winter — December through February.** Central Texas winters are mild until they're not — the hard freezes are what matter. Mortar can't freeze before it cures, so winter

masonry work needs a mason who watches the forecast and protects the work; a January bid should mention cold-weather protection or the contractor isn't thinking. For you: make sure the hose bibs are covered, the irrigation is winterized, and nothing's holding water against the brick where a freeze can work it into the joints. Walk the house after the first hard freeze and look for new spalling — freeze-thaw is the fastest killer of already-weak mortar, and winter shows you what summer hid.

**The PCS overlay.** Layer your orders on top of this calendar. Inbound: do the Chapter 5 inspection in your first thirty days, whatever month it is. Outbound: start the pre-sale masonry assessment ninety days out, do the work sixty days out, list with cured mortar and clean photos. Deployed: the water systems and a trusted set of eyes are the whole plan — gutters scheduled, soaker hoses on timers, sprinkler heads already redirected, and somebody who'll walk the property monthly and call you if something changes.

It's not a lot. Four seasonal touchpoints, most of them under an hour, plus professional work on a sane schedule instead of a panicked one. The families whose brick lasts aren't the ones who think about it constantly — they're the ones who built it

into the rhythm of the year and then stopped worrying about it.

## Chapter 15: The House Serves the Family

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I'll close with the thing I believe about houses in military towns, after fifty years of working on them.

A house near Fort Hood isn't just a building. It's the place a family lands between the hard parts — the constant in a life the Army keeps rearranging. Kids learn to ride bikes on that driveway. Somebody's spouse holds the household together from that kitchen through a deployment. The walls of that house have heard more goodbyes and homecomings than most buildings ever will. The brick deserves to be kept up — not because brick is precious, but because the family inside is.

The deferred maintenance this book describes isn't a moral failure. It's the arithmetic of service — ten families, ten sets of orders, ten correct short-term decisions, one long tab. If you're the family holding that tab right now, don't try to pay it all at once. Read the walls. Fix the water first — it's free. Fix the chimney next — it's where water gets in. Work the lintels and the mailbox into the year's rhythm. Hire the mason who measures and writes things down. And when your orders

come, leave the brick better than you found it — not as a favor to the next family, though they'll appreciate it, but because a maintained house sells faster, appraises cleaner, and hands you back at closing what you put into it.

To every service member and military family reading this: thank you. The country asks a lot of you, and the house is the least of it — but it's yours, and taking care of it is one of the quiet ways you take care of each other. The brick will do its job for another fifty years if you give it the maintenance it's owed. That's not a sales pitch. That's just how masonry works.

Take care of the house, and it'll take care of the family.

## **About the Author**

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in Texas brick, masonry, and foundation work. He owns [Champion Brick Repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — (817) 900-6324 — [Metro Foundation Repair](<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) — (817) 670-4474 — and the [LintelLOCK](<https://lintlerepair.com>) lintel system — (469) 730-0650. All his books are free at [Travis Nech's Free Book Library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>).