

THE OUTPOST

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Like a rock: heavy equipment mechanic served at home, abroad

By Mark Schauer

Testing in YPG's extreme environment is meant to push the most powerful military equipment to its breaking point.

When that happens to any mechanical facet of the hull of a massive tracked vehicle, it is Ben Bendele's job to get it up and running again.

The most common vehicles Bendele and his crew work on are M1A2 tanks, Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and Paladin self propelled howitzers, but the shop is also responsible for maintaining the proving ground's M88 armored recovery vehicles.

"It could be annual preventative maintenance, it could be corrective maintenance and troubleshooting," explained Bendele. "Throughout the whole day as one goes out, I get another one in."

Bendele has worked at YPG since retiring from the Marine Corps as a Master Sgt. in 1993. He began working on tire tests, but the large tracked vehicles under test at the proving ground caught his eye.

"I was working with wheels all the time and saw tanks go by and thought, 'I'd like to work on one of those,'" Bendele recalls. "They were short of personnel over here, so I transferred over."

He has been there ever since, seeing the tracked vehicle workload increase dramatically over the years. His excellence in the job recently resulted in Bendele being named YPG's civilian of the quarter for the third quarter of 2014.

"He comes out and gets the job done," said Kenny Stuart, test vehicle maintenance branch chief. "I leave

him in charge when I'm not here because he does a good job in whatever I have him do, and I can count and rely on him. Without him, I'd be lost."

A native of Santa Maria, California, Bendele and his brothers grew up on a dairy farm, milking cows and fixing tractors from a young age.

"I had a cousin who during Vietnam was in the Marine Corps and I decided to go the same way," he recalled. "Something caught me about the uniform."

Since he was only 17, Bendele needed his parents' permission to join, and his father, a Korean War veteran, tried to talk him out of enlisting.

"He finally got mad and signed it, bless his heart."

Marine Corps basic training was rigorous and



(PHOTO BY MARK SCHAUER)

Ben Bendele (right), heavy track lead, "does a good job in whatever I have him do," said Kenny Stuart, test vehicle maintenance branch chief.

demanding, but Bendele thrived.

"I went in weighing 139 pounds and came out of

boot camp weighing 159 pounds. I gained that much weight in muscle."

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LIKE A ROCK

FROM PAGE 1

His first duty station was Hawaii, but he was deployed for all but 13 months of his three year tour there. Though American combat in Vietnam had ended, Bendele participated in Operation Eagle Pull and Operation Frequent Wind, the harrowing evacuations of American and South Vietnamese personnel from the capitol city of Saigon, South Vietnam in April 1975.

"We were there up to 24 hours. There was no time to sleep or do anything but get it done. When it came time for the last chopper, we had to throw our flight jackets and helmets over to get everybody in the chopper. We were receiving fire and you could see the tanks rolling in."

After being stationed in

Oklahoma, Bendele first came to Marine Corps Air Station Yuma in 1984.

"When I first got here to Yuma, I liked it. Everbody was telling me, 'You don't want to go to Yuma, it's too hot!' I was tired of cold weather: this is good for my bones."

He would ultimately return to a different squadron at MCAS-Yuma, but not before receiving orders to embassy duty. He went through the rigorous training course at Quantico, Virginia and served for three years as a detachment commander, first in Costa Rica, where he met then-American Secretary of State George Schultz, then in Stuttgart, Germany, where he was stationed when the Berlin Wall fell.

"I almost got to Morocco,

but they sent me to Costa Rica, probably because I speak Spanish. I don't speak it fluently like my parents, though: I understand more than I can speak."

After one more stint on Okinawa, Bendele returned to Yuma and retired from the Marines, starting his career at YPG.

The father of five and grandfather of 10 plays guitar for fun, but spends much of his spare time fixing something other than tanks and fighting vehicles.

"For about three years now I've been trying to remodel an old home I have. It takes time and money, but whenever I get a chance I work on it. As soon as we're done, we're moving in and moving my parents into our old house."

Burros parade across YPG



(PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. TINA VILLALOBOS)

A herd of burros were caught on camera recently, as they "jay-walked" across the Walker gate on the Yuma Test Center area paying no mind to vehicles or the security guards at the gate. No CAC cards, no driver license, no nothing, yet they got on board.

Next Outpost deadline is noon December 31st
Sexual Assault Hotline: 920-3104 a 24/7 Hotline
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Road Closure on YPG

Attention All:

Shipman Avenue will be closed between Cholla and Yucca St for pipe culvert installation work from January 5, through January 28, 2015.

For more information, call the following:
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THE OUTPOST

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 (Light refreshment will be served following the service)



Relocating from one climate extreme to another

By Chuck Wullenjohn

Jennifer Lawless, technical editor, made a momentous move three years ago. In the middle of winter, she relocated from one of the nation's hottest areas, Yuma, to one of its coldest, Delta Junction, Alaska.

Born and raised in the desert Southwest, Lawless had worked at YPG since 2008, moving from a data collector to a lead quality assurance position. During the 2010/11 winter she had the opportunity of participating in Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle testing at the Cold Regions Test Center, liked it, and decided to make Alaska her home. The next year, in January, her dream became a reality.

Moving to Alaska in the midst of its coldest months involved a bit of culture shock at first, for she had never lived in an area with temperatures that cold. One day, the temperature fell to 47 degrees below zero.

"I remember my eyelids freezing one night while I was downrange working on a test," she said.

Lawless was examining an engine compartment and remembers that her eyes were watering at the time. The temperature was far below zero, which led to her eyelids quickly freezing. This was a potentially dangerous situation, for everything becomes brittle in extreme cold, including eyelash hairs. If a person

tries to force frozen eyelids open, the hairs will break off.

"I had been warned this might happen, so a Soldier led me to an enclosed maintenance bay where I waited until they thawed," she said.

Lawless enjoys the difference her new life offers. She "loves" the challenge amid a completely new environment.

"This is a small community and everyone bands together," she said. "After you've been here a week or two, suddenly you have a family." When she first moved, other CRTC employees helped find a place to live for her, as well as a new vehicle.

Prior to moving to Alaska, she had never been hunting. Now she's hunted both caribou and moose. Canoeing during the warm summer months has become one of her favorite pleasures.

"Living here is one of those things people either love or hate," she says. "There are no 24 hour stores in Delta Junction, like Yuma's three Walmarts, and no Best Buys or Olive Gardens. The nearest large town, Fairbanks, is 100 miles away. However, if you thrive in an outdoor environment, this area has a great deal to offer."

But she still says the extreme cold can be difficult. "Once the temperature is in the negative 40s, it's downright cold. You can't layer your clothing enough – it's just cold."



(PHOTO BY CHUCK WULLENJOHN)

As a technical editor, Lawless cares about using proper grammar and punctuation in the reports she reviews. A poster on the wall of her office says it all.

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The education of a team lead

By Mark Schauer

Seven years ago, a University of Arizona engineering student spent a summer interning in YPG's ground combat division.

Today, he is a veteran of testing a variety of combat vehicles and manages 10 test officers and the test center's second-largest hand receipt.

Omar Silva, team leader for Ground Combat's special projects team, is the epitome of the up and coming generation of YPG leadership: locally raised, outgoing, thriving through growth and change.

"Engineering is find a problem, look for a solution, and that has always been my mentality and personality. I've always wanted to find a better way to do something."

Though born in Bakersfield, California, Silva considers himself a local native.

"I've lived with my family in Arizona since I was two months old," he said.

He grew up in the border town of San Luis, watching its explosive growth from a sleepy town of a few thousand people, so small that it bussed its few high school students 20 miles north to Yuma.

"I was in the last graduating class from San Luis to go to Kofa High School. I did the bus trip for four years."

He began his higher education at Arizona Western College to stay close to his family and played bass in a Spanish rock band that got local attention. Yet after a year, Silva knew he wanted to go to the University of Arizona to pursue mechanical engineering.

"I've always been good at math. I always liked to figure out how things worked. But the thing that really pushed me over the hump to become an engineer was my cousin, the first

family member to get her bachelor's degree."

He interned at YPG during the summer and winter breaks of his junior and senior years, working on the Bradley Fighting Vehicle during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that caused an astronomical rise in the proving ground's ground vehicle testing. He liked the work and his superiors liked him.

"I graduated on Friday, started working on Monday," he recalls with a smile.

That was in 2008, three years before YPG's workload peaked at nearly double what it had been in the typical years prior to the wars. Troops in two overseas wars were counting on the work done at the proving ground, and Silva was keenly aware of the stakes.

"When I started working here, I saw a different side of engineering. We always think engineering is nuts and bolts, but working here is more systems management engineering. At first the amount of responsibility was a little daunting, but I embraced it and really liked the mission."

Perhaps the most important early lesson he learned concerned safety in YPG's extreme environment. One blazing hot summer day as he helped move heavy boxes at a gun position, his nose began to bleed for no apparent reason. Silva wanted to work through the malady.

"The senior test officer told me to go inside, take a break, get some water. I said, 'I really want to help, I don't want the crew to do it all,' but he insisted. About 15 or 20 minutes after I sat down inside, it hit me. I began to feel a little dizzy and weird."

He spent the rest of the day indoors.



(PHOTO BY MARK SCHAUER)

Omar Silva, team leader for Ground Combat's special projects team, is the epitome of the up and coming generation of YPG leadership.

"Now every time I go out there, I keep an eye on everybody. Somebody might think they're just fine like I did, but if it hadn't been for the senior test officer telling me to sit down, I probably would have been a heat casualty. We are here to collect data and do testing, but the one thing you can't reverse is someone getting hurt: there is always another day to collect data."

Silva's safety consciousness was recognized as part of the sterling performance that made him YPG's most recent civilian of the quarter: last fiscal year, his team expended about 120,000 labor hours testing 15 different systems, including the Bradley and Stryker combat vehicles, without a safety incident.

On top of the ordinary demands of his job, Silva is also participating in YPG's aspiring leaders program, which, among other things, means he is pursuing a master's degree. So far, he has maintained a 4.0 grade point average, and the end of his program

is in sight.

"I'm one of the six expected to graduate this coming May with a master's in engineering management."

Silva is also an active participant in YPG's youth outreach program, speaking about engineering to children in the local schools. He has also served as a judge in Yuma County's annual science fair for several years.

"I really enjoy talking to the kids and sharing the knowledge I have. If I was that teenager, I would like to have that information so I can figure out my path. I enjoy it a lot and think it roots from my mom, who is an educator and very passionate about her work."

Silva expects to stay at YPG for the duration of his career. He met his wife, Savanna, when she was a data collector. After they married, she quit working for a while to pursue a systems engineering degree of her own, and now works as a test officer.

SEE **EDUCATION** page 5

— CHAPLAIN'S CORNER — A New Day

Submitted by Chaplain (Maj.) Douglas Thomison

Happy New Year Yuma Proving Ground. This is indeed the first 2015 edition of The Outpost. I do hope you had a wonderful Christmas, Hanukah and New Year's celebration. That being said, sometimes it is hard returning to work, school and the calendar "norm."

Maybe returning to a regular work week causes you to empathize with the guy in the following story: There was a man who wanted to "get away from it all." You may recall the bus driver from New York City who drove his bus from New York, New York to Miami, Florida without permission? That's right; he simply got on the interstate and headed due south. The problem was that not only did the fellow not really get away, but when he returned to New York his problems were far worse. Thus, don't try his technique. It doesn't work.

But seriously, we have all wanted to extend our family or holiday time back home. However, that is not a reality. Thus, I encourage you not to get the "post-holiday blues."

As we begin a brand new year, try to make each day count. During Advent we lit the candles of hope, peace, joy and love. Each day we should aspire to live out these attributes. When you wake up each morning attempt to be thankful for new breath (take some breaths), a fresh start (think of possibilities), and try savoring a day that has never taken place before. The Bible says, "This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118:24

Sometimes reentry back to daily life isn't easy. I encourage you to try to embrace each day to the fullest. Yuma Proving Ground, have a blessed day, month and glorious new year.

EDUCATION

FROM PAGE 4

"I want to give back to the community. That is one of the things I came back for: one was family, the other was wanting to

give back. I saw a lot of my friends graduating college and leaving San Luis and thought, 'You know what? We need to bring some of that knowledge back.'"

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Multi-branch fusion: YPG tests fuzes for Navy

By Mark Schauer

Lot acceptance testing, the testing of a sample of artillery in real-world conditions to ensure reliability, is an important part of YPG's ground combat workload.

Less well known, however, is that YPG conducts lot acceptance for Navy artillery and fuzes. Recently, the MK 437 multi-option fuze for use by the Navy was extensively tested at the proving ground.

For a munition to detonate when and where necessary, a fuze is vitally important. It both triggers a detonation and has safety features that keep gun crews safe by preventing a shell from exploding while being handled prior to firing or detonating too soon.

There are fuzes that can be set to detonate a shell at a preset time in flight, when it detects a certain distance from the ground or a structure, or when it hits a target. The Army's M782 multi-option fuze combined all these potential fuze settings into a single fuze that can be used on either 105mm or 155mm howitzer shells. In the last decade, the Navy wanted a comparable multi-option fuze compatible with their guns and developed the MK437, as a result.

Though a naval system, in many ways YPG testing was similar to artillery evaluations performed for the Army: high speed cameras shooting thousands

of frames per second capture crisp images of the projectile leaving the tube as it fires, and television cameras far downrange capture the round's detonation. The muzzle velocity of the round leaving the tube is measured, and the round's accuracy is scored. Yet, there were differences.

"The big challenge was getting the Navy gun tube set up on something that isn't a battleship," said Adam Rinne, test officer. "You can't park a battleship at one of our gun positions."

This challenge was met by mechanics from YPG and the Naval Surface Warfare Center. Even after this, the seasoned crew had to adjust to differences in firing

Army and Navy rounds. For example, there are non-combustible parts to the Navy round's propellant that can eject from the muzzle when fired. This debris is harmless, but its presence was initially unfamiliar to those accustomed to Army howitzers.

All in all, however, the test was a groundbreaking endeavor for all involved.

"It's been a good experience," said Lawrence Liberman, fuze design agent for the Naval Surface Warfare Center. "Once we got the test going, YPG is really efficient."



OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: YPG weapons operators ram the MK 437-equipped round into the 5-inch Navy gun tube. "The big challenge was getting the Navy gun tube set up on something that isn't a battleship," said Adam Rinne, test officer. "You can't park a battleship at one of our gun positions."

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: With the MK 437 fuze set, the projectile is ready to fire. The fuze can be set to detonate a shell at a preset time in flight, when it detects a certain distance from the ground or a structure, or when it hits a target.

RIGHT TOP: Though a naval system, in many ways YPG testing was similar to artillery evaluations performed for the Army. Here, a weapons operator uses a level to measure elevation.

RIGHT BOTTOM: YPG weapons operators fire munitions from more than 20 different systems, including 5-inch guns found on Navy ships. Here, a crew readies a projectile for a lot acceptance test of the MK 437 multi-option fuze for Navy (MOFN).

(PHOTOS BY MARK SCHAUER)



— SOCIAL SECURITY — CORNER

Coming of Age...Again

**Submitted by Wilma Carrasquillo-Facio,
Social Security Manager**

Think back to when you were younger.

Life was simple at the kids' table. The smell of a home-cooked dinner filling the air on a lazy Sunday afternoon and, after dinner, everyone crowding around the TV to watch the last football game of the season.

Fast-forward a few years, when the adults first invited you to their table, and your life changed. Your coming-of-age moment had arrived! This rite of passage is a transition from asking permission to giving notice.

Coming-of-Age Day in Japan honors all the young people who reached age 20 during the past year. This national holiday takes place on the second Monday of January and celebrates their privileges and responsibilities as new adults.

Coming-of-age moments don't come just once in life. Another important coming-of-age moment occurs when you decide to retire. Social Security can help.

Determining when to retire is a personal decision, influenced by your preferences and lifestyle. We encourage you to go online to www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs and read our fact sheet, When To Start Receiving Retirement Benefits. You may find that this information helps you make an informed decision about the best time to retire. Invest the time to learn what you should do now to enjoy your retirement later.

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It has never been easier to come of age at retirement!

Take advantage of our services and resources to make the best decision for you at www.socialsecurity.gov.

Tree lighting ceremony: an evening of friendship and fun!

Yuma Proving Ground's Family Morale Welfare and Recreation Directorate (FMWR) held its annual Christmas Tree lighting on Tuesday, Dec. 9 at Cox Field with Lt. Col. James DeBoer welcoming everyone to the event. Over 150 active duty and civilians and surrounding residents of the YPG community joined the festivities and waited patiently the arrival of Santa. There were cookies and refreshments for everyone in attendance and numerous prizes were given away to both the children and adults. A small Christmas tree decorating contest was held during the week and the trees were on display as the winner was announced. Anna Marie Smith had the honors of placing the FMWR ornament on the great big Christmas tree as it was lit, in addition, the ceremony could not go without the traditional Christmas caroling.

(PHOTOS BY YOLIE CANALES)





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Another 100,000 troops on road to civilian employment

As more Soldiers prepare to transition out of the Army, private-sector businesses continue to make the pledge to put those experienced Service members to work.

For instance, the American Trucking Association recently announced its commitment to hire some 100,000 military veterans as part of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's "Hiring our Heroes" program.

"There's no higher calling for an American than to serve in our armed forces, and I'd like to think that driving a truck -- delivering America's most essential goods safely and efficiently is also a high calling," said American Trucking Association President and CEO Bill Graves. "That's why we're so proud

to be partnering with Hiring Our Heroes and committing on behalf of the trucking industry to hire 100,000 veterans over the next two years."

But the American Trucking Association is just one of multiple private-sector companies that have made such pledges.

"So many organizations and companies representing government agencies, non-government organizations, and private companies have answered our commander in chief's challenge to train and hire our transitioning Service members, veterans, and family members," said Col. Adam L. Roche, director of the Army's Soldier for Life Program. "Some have committed to specific hiring objectives with each company, while others continue to improve

education and wellness opportunities ... including access to various job training, employment skills training, apprenticeships and internships."

Roche said that there are "hundreds" of organizations and companies that have committed to "recognizing the unique opportunity that Soldiers, veterans, and their family members bring to various sectors within industry."

Other such programs include the Shifting Gears Automotive Technician Training Program; the Veterans in Piping, Welding and HVAC program; the Veterans in Construction (Electric) program; the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades program; the Microsoft Software Engineer Academy program; the Veterans Entering Trucking program; and the National Institute of Sheet Metal Workers program.

Roche said that the recent budget-related drawdown has caused Army transitions to spike to about 90,000 Soldiers annually. If the Army is not required to draw down below 490,000, he said, transitions should return to the pre-drawdown rate of about 75,000 annually.

Those Soldiers leaving the Army each year are being prepared for civilian life through the Army's Transition Assistance Program, which previously was called the "Army Career and Alumni Program." TAP is now part of Roche's "Soldier for Life"

program.

"The Transition Assistance Program is responsible for the structured transition process that begins 12-18 months prior to transition," Roche said.

As Soldiers prepare to leave the Army, they are required to enroll in the Soldier for Life-Transition Assistance Program. As part of their involvement in that program, Soldiers learn of job opportunities such as those offered by the ATA, and learn what they must do to take advantage of those programs.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III said that while the Army does not find civilian work for Soldiers after they leave service, it does help prepare Soldiers for private-sector jobs. Soldiers themselves, he said, with adequate guidance from the Army and their leadership, must prepare themselves for their futures.

"Soldiers can help themselves," he said. "That's through getting as much civilian education and credentialing opportunities as they can while on active duty. When a Soldier starts, there should be a plan in place for that individual to start working on college after one year of active federal service."

(For more ARNEWS stories, visit www.army.mil/ARNEWS, or Facebook at www.facebook.com/ArmyNewsService, or Twitter @ArmyNewsService)

Resilience Tips

Physical - Weekly exercise can protect your brain from the aging process and delay the onset of neurodegenerative disease. Hence, not only does exercise improve and maintain your physical health, it can improve and maintain your psychological health

Social - Effective communication with peers and leaders requires effort and practice. Remember to use the IDEAL model when you are faced with a challenge or conflict. (I= Identify and understand the problem. D= Describe the problem objectively and accurately. E= Express your concerns and how you feel (when appropriate). A= Ask the other person for his/her perspective and then ask for a reasonable change. L= List the positive consequences that will occur if the person makes the agreed upon

change.)

Spiritual - Some would contend that interacting with animals builds the spirit. Research, in the human-animal bond, support the idea that animals make us more human. Spending time with your pet is probably good for both of you!

Emotional - The brain and nervous system respond best when given structure. Creating a routine for an important task can focus the brain and body on the necessary steps to achieving success, while lowering counterproductive levels of stress that inhibit emotional balance.

Family - When they can't solve problems on their own, resilient families reach out for help by turning to extended family, friends, neighbors, community services and/or counseling.



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Only need one shoe?

Submitted by Paul J. Kilanski,
Family Advocacy Program Specialist

Your feet carry you thousands of miles in your lifetime so it is critical that you take good care of them.

You can inherit problems with your feet from your Aunt Sue but more often trouble with feet are caused by wear and tear or neglect. The shoes you wear make a big difference in the health of your feet. Wearing the wrong size of shoes can cause neuromas, corns, calluses, blisters, hammertoes, back and leg pain, bleeding or numbness.

If you have two feet that are the same size then it is easy to find a pair with a good fit and style. However, there are millions of people around the world that need a pair of shoes in different sizes and there are also many handicapped and injured people who need just one shoe. In the United States alone almost 10 percent of the population wears - or should wear - a different sized shoe on each foot.

Who are these people who need two different sized shoes to make a pair or who only need one shoe? People with feet that are two different sizes, those with clubfeet, polio survivors, the handicapped

or injured, amputees, lymphedema sufferers, and diabetics.

So what is a person who has two different sized feet or who only has one foot do when it comes to buying shoes? The old solution to this problem was expensive and inconvenient. Often people with feet of different sizes buy one pair each of the same shoe in two different sizes, leaving a closet full of unused mismatched shoes.

People who only need to wear one shoe because of an injury or disability paid for two shoes when they only needed one. Some people spend hours visiting thrift and second hand stores looking for two identical shoes in two different sizes.

There are two non-profit organizations, the National Odd Shoe Exchange and the One Shoe Crew, that provide shoes for amputees and people with mismatched feet. These organizations can only help so many people because it is impossible for those organizations to find a matching pair of shoes in each of an individual's shoe sizes given the many brands, styles, and colors of shoes available.

The Internet has opened up a whole new world for people who have mismatched feet or who only need one shoe. General auction sites like ebay allow users to list one shoe out of a pair but given the lack of knowledge about finding odd shoe sizes or single shoes means that many of these auctions end without buyers. One website, MixMatchShoes.com, sells pairs of shoes that are two different sizes but the selection of shoes is limited.

The newest solution for people with mismatched feet are websites that allow users to sell single shoes or mismatched pairs of shoes and to search for other single shoes or mismatched pairs of shoes for sale in their sizes.

Instead of buying two pairs of shoes, a user can buy a single shoe or a pair of mismatched shoes from another user of the site, and a pair of the same brand, style, and color in the size of the buyer's opposite foot from a retailer. After the shoes arrive from the retailer, the buyer can post the shoe(s) not in their size(s) for sale on the site. This type of website gives sellers and buyers a chance to find the

perfect pair of shoes or one shoe in a style and size that fits their feet.

As more people discover and begin to use these sites, there should be pairs of shoes available to accommodate virtually all combinations of mismatched feet so that users will not have to resort to buying a pair of matching shoes from a retailer. Many users with unused mismatched and single shoes ask only that those who can wear the shoes pay shipping charges. Auction, commercial and non-profit sites are adding inventory all the time to make it easier to help the handicapped and people with mismatched feet to purchase stylish, comfortable shoes. Thanks to the Internet, purchasing one shoe or two different sized shoes in a pair will become a easier shopping experience.

Kent Basson is the founder of OddShoeFinder.com an online website that helps people find mismatched or single shoes. The site was created after Kent's sister suffered a foot injury that resulted in her having to buy two different sized shoes. After searching the web, he discovered the problem is far more common resulting in millions of unused, mismatched pairs of shoes that can now be given away, sold or purchased at oddshoefinder.com.

SAFETY CORNER

Shock to the System

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 CHRISTOPHER M. O'BRIEN F Company,
2-135th Aviation Battalion, Camp Beauregard, La.

I don't claim to be a "man's man," but I'm not scared of anything — well, except electricity. There's something about knowing that electricity is all around me that is unnerving. I can't see it and it can kill me at any time if I'm not careful. Nowadays, just about everything requires electricity, and sometimes I am required to (reluctantly) work closely with it.

Electricity shouldn't be a big deal,

should it? I mean everything is safely wrapped in protective sleeves and neatly tucked inside the walls and behind electrical outlet covers. Neat and tidy — that's what I had at my house. But I also have a teenage son, and he managed to destroy the entire face of an electrical outlet in our carport. I'm not talking about just part of the outlet being destroyed. Everything plastic was in pieces on the ground, exposing all of the

electrically charged guts inside.

I was traveling to Fort Rucker, Ala., the next day to attend the Aviation Safety Officer Course and couldn't leave that outlet exposed for six weeks. I also didn't want to pay an electrician \$150 for a house call that would require only 15 minutes of work. So, against my better judgment, I decided to suppress my fear of electricity and do the work myself. While at it, I figured I would also

replace the other old outlet cover in the carport. Easy, right? Wrong!

I know the basics of electricity. I don't poke metal objects into the little slots and I try not to be around water when I'm plugging and unplugging electrical appliances and tools. I also know there's an electric breaker box in the house. If I could figure out which breaker controlled that outlet, I could flip it off so I could safely make

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the repairs. So that's what I did.

I thought I was smart. I plugged a drop light into the undamaged outlet I'd also planned to replace and told my son to tell me when it went out as I flipped breaker switches. I didn't have to wait long, as the light went out when the first switch was flipped.

I chose to replace the undamaged outlet first. I took the drop light out of the outlet, removed the retaining screw from the cover plate and took it off. I reached in with my fingers and pulled out the outlet hardware. I didn't get shocked! I was extremely relieved. I figured I had just saved myself \$75 in electrician fees.

Next, I moved to the damaged outlet. I decided to plug in the drop light to reassure myself it wasn't live. I reached down, and started to plug in the light. When I got about a quarter-inch away from the outlet,

there was a huge spark and loud pop. The outlet was still hot.

I had to now — call my dad! After he laughed at me for a little while, he explained what had happened and passed on few electrical facts I believe everyone should know. First, just because one outlet is dead doesn't mean the one next to it is also dead. I guess that should be obvious, but I didn't consider it. Yeah, I bet you already knew that, right? OK, well how about this? Say there are two plug-ins on the same outlet. Did you know that you can put the top plug-in on a different breaker from the bottom plug-in? Sure you did. Well, what about this? You can have a fan light switch and the fan on/off switch on two different breakers. That was news to me. And here's the final thing I learned: Even though you flipped off the breaker to a particular light switch (or outlet), and the light turned off when you flipped that breaker, there is a way

electricians can wire it so there is still electricity flowing to the light and not to the switch. All you need to do is touch the live wire and you complete the circuit.

So what are you supposed to do? Calling an electrician is definitely the safest way to go. Or, you could buy a voltage tester pen, which, when placed near an energized object, will give both an audible and visual

an electrically charged danger. This lets you know that there is still a step to be completed before you can safely touch the object without fear of electrical shock. I bought one of these pens with the money I saved by repairing the two previously mentioned outlets on my own. In the future, though, I'll probably just leave the electricity to the professionals.



Christmas present

The Kofa National Wildlife Refuge just received a very special Christmas present. Twenty-one Sonoran pronghorn were delivered to the refuge in mid-December. Once these new pronghorn acclimate to their surroundings, they will be released to join other pronghorn released last year. This is part of an ongoing effort to recover this federally endangered species and biologists are monitoring the pronghorn through the use of radio telemetry. The Kofa pronghorn population has done quite well, producing 11 fawns in the wild over the summer. Many of the pronghorn spend a great deal of time on YPG territory.

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