

THE OUTPOST

U.S. ARMY YUMA PROVING GROUND, YUMA, ARIZONA 85365 | VOLUME 66 NO. 4 MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2017

YPG impresses at Yuma's Military Appreciation Day

By Mark Schauer

Yuma has a large population of veterans and a long history of military presence.

To celebrate both, the Yuma County Chamber of Commerce's Military Affairs Committee staged its first annual Military Appreciation Day in early February with a full day of activities on the campus of Arizona Western College.

In opening remarks, Yuma Mayor Doug Nicholls recalled playing around YPG's Big Guns as a child and reflected on the importance of the military to the community and the nation's security.

"For those who have given their lives, their time, and their security in order to help provide for me and my family, and for our community and country, I can't help but be here today to say, 'thank you very much for everything you've done,'" he said.

YPG's exhibit consisting of two table displays of vintage Army helmets and equipment from World War I to the present saw a steady stream of visitors, including men and women who had long years of experience with the gear.

"I had the opportunity to talk with a lot of veterans," said YPG Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Prosser, who

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YPG Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Prosser (left) talks with visitors to the YPG booth at the Yuma County Chamber of Commerce's Military Appreciation Day in early February. Taking place at Arizona Western College's main campus, the event drew hundreds of visitors, many of them veterans. "That's what makes it personal and worth coming out here," Prosser said. (Photo by Mark Schauer)

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Spur Parade
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Week
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Heritage Center curator Bill Heidner (right) interprets YPG's display of Army artwork for Military Appreciation Day visitors. "They're blown away, especially when they find out they all were painted by Soldiers. The quality of the artwork is phenomenal," he said. (Photos by Mark Schauer)

APPRECIATION

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also delivered opening remarks. "One World War II veteran got quite emotional talking about fighting in the Battle of the Bulge across the Rhine River. That's what makes it personal and worth coming to events like this."

Inside AWC's 3C building, an entire hallway was devoted to artwork produced by active duty Soldiers across the Army's history.

"We're highlighting the faces of Soldiers," explained Bill Heidner, Heritage Center curator. "The purpose of the event is to express appreciation for the military, and Soldiers are what makes the Army."

The well-attended event saw hundreds of visitors eager to express their support and thanks to the many men and women, both active duty and retired, who sacrificed to protect our freedom and way of life.

"We're very fortunate to live in the country we live in," said Prosser. "Having an all-volunteer force makes our veterans that much more special. Anyone who volunteers to serve during wartime deserves special recognition."

Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Prosser gives welcoming remarks at the Yuma County Chamber of Commerce's Military Appreciation Day. Prosser gave particular credit to the Families of Soldiers for their sacrifices and devotion. "I couldn't do this without my family, and I know a lot of other Soldiers couldn't, either," he said.



THE OUTPOST

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Come out fighting: The first African-American tankers in combat

By Elizabeth M. Collins

The explosion was massive, far larger than the men of the 761st Tank Battalion were expecting when they responded to a German attack in the Rhineland town of Silz, Germany.

The rounds from their M4 Sherman tanks had struck an ammunition dump in the town, and the tankers watched with a combination of sympathy and satisfaction as the houses, which had also been used to store munitions, exploded one-by-one until the town became a raging inferno. Leaving Silz in ashes, like so many other towns along the Siegfried Line, they continued to push toward

the Rhine River in March 1945.

In assigning the 761st Tank Battalion to lead Task Force Rhine with elements of the 103rd Infantry Division, Army leaders hadn't chosen just any tank battalion. The 761st was the first African-American tank unit to go into combat. By that March, the tankers were steely and battle-hardened, but even before they had landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France, Oct. 10, 1944, they were some of the best-trained tankers in the Army, thanks to two years spent at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, and Camp Hood, Texas.

"They trained for almost two years

at a time when armor crewmen were getting as little as three months of training because of the pressures of the war. Because they were African Americans, the Army didn't quite know what to do with them," said former Sgt. Wayne D. Robinson, the historian for the 761st Tank Battalion association.

When the 761st finally got to France, the tankers encountered a few individuals who may have had trouble with their darker skin, but for the most part Soldiers were worried about their missions and about staying alive, not skin color. Many infantry Soldiers didn't even know that the tankers running with them were black, said Robinson.

Army leaders were certainly happy to see the men. Third Army's Gen. George Patton addressed the tankers

himself, saying, "I would never have asked for you if you weren't good. I don't care what color you are so long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sons of bitches."

With those words ringing in their ears the tankers rolled into battle, coming under heavy fire in Vic-sur-Seille, France, Nov. 8, 1944. The men fought hard, but it was still a terrifying and disorienting experience, especially when rain turned the roads to muddy rivers that made it nearly impossible to maneuver.

The men also faced a German roadblock that would have meant almost certain death. Without waiting for orders, Staff Sgt. Ruben Rivers of Able Company climbed out of

SEE **TANKERS** page 4



Cpl. Carlton Chapman, .50 caliber machine gunner, looks up from inside an M4 tank near Nancy, France on November 5, 1944. He was killed in action four days later. (Loaned photo)

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The 761st Tank Battalion was the first African-American tank unit to go into combat. Even before they had landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France on Oct. 10, 1944, they were some of the best-trained tankers in the Army, thanks to two years spent at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, and Camp Hood, Texas. (Loaned photo)

TANKERS

FROM PAGE 3

his lead tank carrying a large cable. Dodging bullets, he fastened the cable to the tree in the road, and then returned to his tank to clear the road, allowing the Soldiers to proceed.

Barely a week later, Rivers, who had already been nominated for one Silver Star, was left with a deep, bloody leg wound from his knee to his hip when his tank hit a land mine during the unit's Nov. 15 to 19 assault on Guebling, France. Rivers reluctantly let his fellow Soldiers bandage his leg before climbing into another tank, refusing further medical aid throughout the night and into the next morning when he radioed his commander that he could see the enemy.

Passing within 200 yards of the Germans, Rivers opened fire, helping cover Able Company's withdrawal. The next shot came in on his turret, killing Rivers and another tanker. Rivers received another Silver Star, and in 1997, after a long campaign by his company commander, Rivers belatedly received the Medal of Honor.

Another trap awaited the 761st the second day of combat, Nov. 9, only it didn't end as well. This time the men of Charlie Company ran into a massive tank ditch near Morville, France. It was heavily mined and within range of a column of German pillboxes. Charlie Company lost seven tanks almost immediately, and as men tried to crawl to safety, German soldiers easily picked them off.

Platoon leader 2nd Lt. Kenneth W. Coleman lined the men up and trailed them as he laid fire to help cover their escape. 1st Sgt. Samuel Turley stayed behind, rushing toward the enemy and standing in the open as he took out enemy machine gun nests until he was nearly cut in two. Coleman was also killed, as were 12 other tankers. American forces took the town the next day.

Coleman and Turley both received posthumous Silver Stars, although DiNicolo has documentation showing that Turley was actually nominated for a Medal of Honor. She believes that when the case was re-examined in the 1990s, there were no longer enough documents or witnesses to support awarding the nation's highest award for valor.

During 183 days of continuous combat, the 761st fought all over northern and central Europe, from the Battle of the Bulge at Tillet, France, to the Battle of the Rhine, eventually making it all the way to Austria. The Army awarded the unit with four campaign ribbons: Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace and Central Europe. In addition, the men received 11 Silver Stars, 69 Bronze Stars and about 300 Purple Hearts. In 1978, the 761st received a coveted Presidential Unit Citation. The cost was high, however, with 36 men killed in action, 22 in November alone. They died defending a segregated country, Robinson said, noting that the Army began desegregating shortly after the war.

During 183 days of continuous combat in World War II, the 761st Tank Battalion fought all over northern and central Europe, from the Battle of the Bulge at Tillet, France, to the Battle of the Rhine, eventually making it all the way to Austria. The unit's men received 11 Silver Stars, 69 Bronze Stars and about 300 Purple Hearts. In 1978, the 761st received a Presidential Unit Citation. (Loaned photo)



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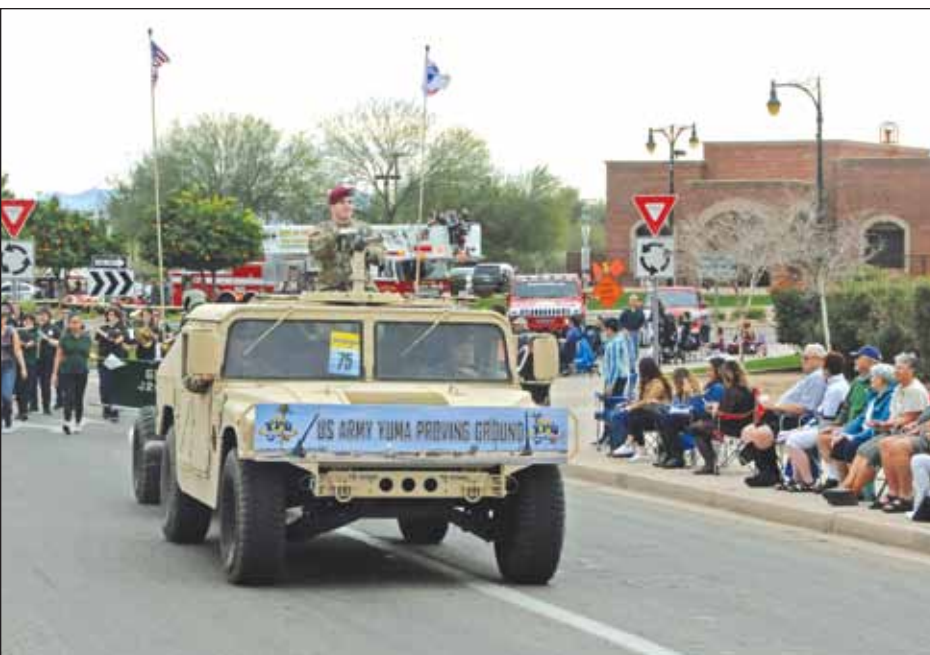
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YPG rides in Silver Spur Parade



YPG Soldiers, led by CSM Christopher Prosser, participated in Yuma's annual Silver Spur Rodeo parade held Saturday, Feb. 11th in downtown Yuma. One of nearly 100 parade entries, crowds of hundreds lined the parade route. The Silver Spur Rodeo has been part of the Yuma winter entertainment scene since the 1940s. (Photo by Mark Schauer)

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Fort Sherman boasts long, illustrious history

By Mark Schauer

It was the late 1990s, and then-Capt. John Cavedo, commander of a Special Forces Operational Detachment, already had extensive experience in the tropics. He had been stationed at Panama's Fort Clayton for nearly two years, and also in Thailand. He had even traveled

multiple times to Panama's Fort Sherman to participate in training exercises, but the one he was participating in now was the most intense.

"It was a three-day trek through dense jungle that culminated in a live fire exercise," recalled Cavedo, now a colonel, and formerly commander of

U.S. Army Cold Regions Test Center, a constituent command of U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground. "We crossed multiple streams with fairly large caiman swimming around us, and our patrol bases were amidst howler monkeys and other animals that kept us very alert at night."

The effects of the extreme jungle environment, however, weren't concluded. After conducting a small arms ambush on a moving target, an eight-man team rendezvoused for an extraction by an MH-60 Black Hawk helicopter dangling a Special Patrol Insertion Extraction (SPIE) rope from high above. The men hooked themselves and their gear to the rope, but the helicopter couldn't ascend vertically fast enough to spare them a bumpy ride.

"The last four at the end of the rope were dragged through trees for a considerable distance, resulting in

minor scrapes and bruises," Cavedo said.

Worse, the SPIE rope began to oscillate in mid-flight. The severe spinning caused one of the Soldiers to pass out in his harness and the Black Hawk pilots considered lowering their dizzied passengers into the surf off the beach. They finally stabilized the rope and set the men down atop a disused concrete coastal artillery battery as originally planned.

"It was realistic training done in peace time with lots of lessons learned," said Cavedo.

Stories similar to Cavedo's are shared by thousands of other current and former American Soldiers who came to Fort Sherman from the early 1960s through the late 1990s to attend the Jungle Operations Training Center (JOTC). Originally created to train men for service in Vietnam, the school taught an average of 7,000 Soldiers per year the basics of jungle survival, and utilized another 1,000 annually to serve as mock opposing forces. In addition to the Jungle Warfare Course, JOTC also conducted jungle survival training for a variety of military occupational specialties, from combat engineers to air crews. The school even provided



LEFT: Formerly a training facility for thousands of Soldiers each year, Fort Sherman consists of more buildings than currently needed for military purposes. The fort originally contained a number of coastal artillery batteries operating huge seacoast cannons to protect the Panama Canal.

BELOW: Once a permanent coast artillery battery manned by a crew of trained gunnery professionals, Battery Kilpatrick is being reclaimed by the rapidly-growing jungle. Nearly all coastal batteries were decommissioned by the end of World War II, rendered obsolete by a new age of long-range bombers, rockets and missiles.



instruction to Soldiers from friendly foreign nations.

Construction of Fort Sherman, located near Colon on the Atlantic Ocean side of the Isthmus of Panama, commenced in 1911, and was conceived as a coastal artillery battery along with Fort Amador, which protected the Pacific side of the isthmus, as bulwarks against a naval attack on the Panama Canal, then under construction. These days, Fort Sherman is used as a training facility by the Panamanian National Air-Naval Service, but bunkers for the batteries remain, and like more modern infrastructure aboard the installation are available for test purposes to evaluators of the U.S. Army Tropic Regions Test Center (TRTC). Permission to use the installation is secured by TRTC from the Panamanian government through coordination with the U.S. Embassy. "Since 2001, every test we brought to Panama through the U.S. Embassy has been accepted by the Panamanian government," said Ernest Hugh, TRTC director. "We have an excellent working relationship with the Panamanians."

The weapons bunkers, well preserved and maintained even after a century of being buffeted by what is considered the saltiest sea spray in the world, host storage testing for customers interested in studying the effects of extreme natural salinity and humidity. A well-maintained airstrip from the latter half of the 20th century makes Fort Sherman an ideal spot for testing moderately-sized unmanned aerial systems, which TRTC evaluators have done on several occasions.

Though Colon is the closest major city to Fort Sherman, Panama City is less than an hour away by a scenic highway that passes over the Chagres River, which feeds Gatun Lake that make the Panama Canal possible.

Even a century after the completion of the canal, the country remains one of the world's premier transit centers, a fact that greatly benefits the Army's



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efforts to conduct tropical testing.

"The advantage of Panama is that the capital is a major hub, a modern city less than an hour away from a triple canopy jungle, as well as other unique tropical microclimates," said Hugh. "In the event of a system malfunction, you can have replacement parts sent overnight delivery from the United States to Panama City. In Panama you have the best of all worlds."

Panama is conveniently located to the United States, too: Air travelers from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles spend more time in flight than those going to Panama City, and at least two daily direct flights are available from American cities like Houston, Atlanta, Miami, Newark,

and Los Angeles.

"The armed forces are realizing the necessity of testing items in tropic environments," said Hugh. "It is critical that the equipment

Soldiers depend on works as expected wherever in the world they are deployed. TRTC is well poised to test a variety of systems in this extreme and unforgiving environment."



Many of Fort Sherman's buildings have decayed over the years as activity declined. However, the necessity of being prepared for military operations in tropical areas remains as important today as ever. (Photos by Mark Schauer)

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Safety Week a hit



Heavy mobile mechanic Paul Wilson (foreground) and lead mechanic Ben Bendele visit a vendor at the Safety & Wellness Expo at the YPG Fitness Center. The expo had over 50 vendors, and was well attended following Safety Week classes held in the post theater. YPG devotes a week each year to focusing on important safety issues that employees need to keep in mind each day. Safety Week's four-hour blocks of instruction featured multiple presenters from across YPG, and discussed things from vehicle safety to first aid. "Nothing good happens on an individual effort," said Mary Svoboda, health physicist. "If it is a good thing, there's a team of people working on it." (Photo by Mark Schauer)



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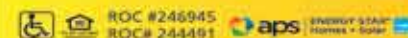
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What are special needs?

Submitted by Paul J. Kilanski, Exceptional Family Member Program Manager

Children with special needs may have mild learning disabilities or profound mental retardation; food allergies or terminal illnesses; developmental delays; occasional panic attacks or serious psychiatric problems. The designation, “special needs”, is useful for getting needed services, setting appropriate goals, and gaining understanding for a child and stressed family.

“Special needs” are commonly defined by what a child can’t do—by milestones unmet, foods banned, activities avoided, experiences denied.

This can make “special needs” seem like a tragic designation. Some parents will always mourn their child’s lost potential while other families may find that their children’s challenges make triumphs sweeter and that weaknesses are often accompanied by amazing strengths.

Pick any two families with special needs and they may seem to have little in common. A family dealing with developmental delays will have different concerns than one dealing with a chronic illness, which will have different concerns than one dealing with mental illness or behavioral challenges.

Medical issues for children include serious conditions like cancer or heart defects, muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis; chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes; congenital conditions like cerebral palsy and dwarfism; and health threats like food allergies and obesity. Children with medical issues may require numerous

tests, long hospital stays, expensive equipment and accommodations for disabilities.

Children with behavior issues don’t respond to traditional discipline. With diagnoses like ADHD, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, and Tourette Syndrome, they require specialized strategies that are tailored to their specific abilities and disabilities. If those strategies are not developed and used, kids with behavior issues throw their families into chaos and are seriously at risk for school problems. Their parents need to be flexible and creative. Developmental disabilities are some of the most devastating for a family to deal with, changing visions of the future and providing immediate difficulties in caring for and educating a child. Diagnoses like autism, Down syndrome and mental retardation often cause children to

be removed from the mainstream and parents must be fierce advocates to make sure their children receive the services, therapy, schooling and inclusion they need and deserve.

Children with learning disabilities like dyslexia and Central Auditory Processing Disorder struggle with schoolwork regardless of their

intellectual abilities. They require specialized learning strategies to meet their potential and avoid self-esteem problems and behavioral difficulties. Parents of learning-challenged kids need to be persistent both in working with their reluctant learners and with the schools that must provide help these children need.

Living with a child with mental health issues can put family members on a roller coaster of mood swings, crises and defiance. Parents have to find the right professionals to help, and make hard decisions about therapy, medications and hospitalization.

Although every special-needs child is different and every family unique, there are some common concerns that link parents of challenged kids,

including getting appropriate care and accommodations; promoting acceptance in the extended family; planning for an uncertain future; and adjusting routines and expectations. Parents of children with special needs are often more flexible, compassionate, stubborn and resilient than other parents. They have to be.



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If you have experience with this project and are interested in joining our team, please email Shearwater Mission Support with your resume at yumaiss@shearwaterllc.com or give us a call at 540-553-5825.

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