

Tour-goers get rare look behind the Big Guns

By Casey Garcia

YPG testing impacts the lives and safety of every Soldier, yet many folks have little understanding of the mission of the proving ground located in their backyard.

For the 30 members of the public who had a unique opportunity to get an up close and personal glimpse of YPG during the first Behind the Big Guns tour of the proving ground during the 2018-19 season offered through the Yuma Visitor's Bureau, however, the reality of YPG's impact has come into better focus.

After being greeted by YPG Commander Col. Ross Poppenberger and Command Sergeant Major Jamathon Nelson, the visitors received an overview briefing from public affairs officer Mark Schauer. The action-packed itinerary also included visits to the vehicle yard of the Armored Systems Test Team and a look at YPG's Air Cargo facility. The visitors then took an in-depth tour of the YPG Heritage Center and enjoyed lunch at the Cactus Café.

The announcement of the tours at the end of last year drew intense

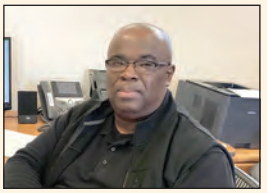
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YPG expands community engagement



For the first time ever, the annual Somerton Tamale Festival in mid-December included a YPG flavor, with Soldiers from the Airborne Test Force letting youngsters of all age—and even a pet or two—get up close and personal with a M-ATV and some of the parachute gear that they use every day. For more photos, please turn to page eight. (Photo by Casey Garcia)

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interest from the local community.

"The three YPG tours sold out within a month of being announced," said Leslie McClendon, Yuma Visitors Bureau tour director. "We had calls every single day from people wanting to visit YPG."

The bureau hopes to arrange similar tours of YPG next year, too.

The visitors had essentially one common response to the question, "Why did you come on this tour?" They said, because although I am not actively serving anymore or never served, I care about our military and what we are doing in the United States to ensure their

safety. Yuma Proving Ground does just that, testing virtually every piece of equipment in the ground combat arsenal, as well as air combat delivery systems.

Yuma Proving Ground's Soldiers and employees make sure that in battle our military is safe and their weaponry is mission capable. In battle, you remember the person to your left and right, and their safety and the well-being of others within your command are what matters. Worrying about whether or not the weapon is going to function properly is not something they need to think about because Yuma Proving Ground has tested all that for our troops in today's military and there is truth in testing.



Public Affairs Officer Mark Schauer (right) gives attendees a YPG overview at the start of the tour. Visit Yuma has conducted several tours of the proving ground per year since 2014. (Photos by Casey Garcia)

THE OUTPOST

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ABOVE: Tour attendees were astonished that YPG tests numerous military vehicles across more than 200 miles of road courses. YPG tests virtually every piece of equipment in the ground combat arsenal. BELOW: A look at YPG's Heritage Center alone was worth the trip to the proving ground. The museum was recently included in a tourist book entitled The Top 100 Military Destinations in America and honored with popular travel website Trip Advisor's annual certificate of excellence.



New budget analyst trades traffic jams for desert dunes

By Tina Villalobos

Derek Hairston is among the new hires in Yuma Proving Ground's resource management, budget section this year. Hairston joined the budget team Dec. 10, as a budget analyst.

He comes well equipped to execute his duties at YPG, with two decades of experience in finance and having earned his Bachelor of Science degree in accounting from Alabama A&M University. Hairston has spent 16 years in government service. His most recent move from the Dallas-Fort Worth area of Texas brought him to his current position at YPG.

"My most recent job was with the State of Texas," said Hairston. "I worked as a program specialist for the Texas Department of Agriculture. My job here at YPG is different in a few ways—one is that in my previous job I had to travel 80 percent of the time."

Hairston was born and raised in Huntsville, Alabama and grew up with one sibling. Huntsville's population of more than 180,000 is double Yuma's 95,000, but neither compares to the size of cities Hairston has grown used to throughout his career.

"Yuma is the smallest place I've ever lived. Other than my hometown, I've always lived in cities with millions of people," said Hairston. "Yuma is a lot more laid back. I moved here from Dallas Ft.

Worth. Before that I lived in the Washington D.C. area of Virginia, and in Atlanta. The hardest thing to get used to is not having easy access to whatever I need or want. The other thing is the much slower pace."

Although Hairston has never served in the military, he enjoys serving as an Army civilian and has worked for an intelligence agency as both a finance officer and as an intelligence officer in collection management. Much of his work focused on East Asian and counter terrorism issues.

When he gets time away from work, Hairston enjoys exploring the world. Being single with no children affords him the ability to follow his passion as an avid traveler. Having visited more than 30 countries, his favorite thing to do is travel to places with historical significance, or natural or man-made wonders.

"Of the countries I've been to, the three I liked the most were Italy, Japan, and Brazil," said Hairston. "Italy for the history, Japan for the culture, and Brazil for the beaches and nightlife."

Hairston lives on post and is enthusiastic about his new position and getting to know the people of YPG. Although Yuma is much smaller than what he's used to, Hairston is looking forward to exploring all that Yuma has to offer.

"My favorite things about the job,



Budget Analyst Derek Hairston comes to YPG from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, where he worked for the Texas Department of Agriculture. "My favorite things about the job, so far, is the people," he said. (Photo by Tina Villalobos)

so far, is the people," said Hairston. "I also appreciate the opportunity to support the military, and the fact that I don't have to be on the road

80 percent of the time. My favorite thing about Yuma, so far, is the lack of traffic jams and the laid-back pace."

Next Outpost deadline is noon, January 10th

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Shootin' the Breeze

Quick...before it breaks!

By David J. Horn

Being an old guy, I've got a lot of old stuff laying around the house. Growing up poor on a farm, we didn't typically replace stuff until it was truly wore out. Today, my house is an odd mixture of new and old stuff, such as my new router and modem, sending a signal to my 36 year old fat TV that still works just fine.

The situation with my cars is kind of interesting. I have two vehicles, one 25 years old, and one 40 years old. The 25 year old vehicle, which is my daily driver, is all about fixing things that have worn out due to its 300K miles of use, such as the lock on the driver's door, or the blower motor in the ventilation system. The 40 year old vehicle, where all the previous issues have mostly been addressed, is now experiencing "age of

materials" issues such as the failure of rubber components, like the rubber brake lines going to each front wheel. When I finally let a car go...well let's just say, that under no circumstances do you want to buy a used car from me.

But, what's upsetting this happy equilibrium, is all the new-fangled electronics, mostly just for the sake of new-fangled electronics, which they're putting in all new stuff.

Now, I think that electronics are a little bit like fire. A little bit brings a lot of benefits. A little fire cooks your food, provides light and warmth, and keeps the bad animals away. A fire that gets too big and out of control however, results in way more problems than you started with.

I think that the people who design and manufacture stuff, have taken this

electronics-for-the-sake-of-electronics thing a little too far. My old washing machine lasted about 20 years before it rusted out. The new one, with a hundred different settings but still didn't wash my clothes any better than the old one, lasted just four years until it developed a problem with its electronics. Same with my dishwasher. Same thing with my house air conditioner. The prospect of dealing with all sorts of failed electronics, leaves me a little leery about replacing my old truck, which at the moment still works fine, with a new one. When I was a kid, the guys with the sports cars all talked about engine horsepower, transmissions, 1/4-mile performance, etc. While today's cars are really fast and efficient, all my friends with new sports cars ever talk about now when they get together is, "Does anybody know what this button does?" Or, "My mechanic just

told me that a \$50.00 sensor on my 5-way electronic suspension system shorted out, which in turn burned out the system's \$3000 electronic control unit!"

While modern electronics is honestly amazing in what it can do when it works, I can't help but wonder just how long any of this stuff will last in our Yuma heat and dust before it craps out, and then...is there a place in town that can actually fix it? With new cell phones costing close to a thousand dollars, it's not like you can just toss out that failed piece of electronic equipment and simply buy a new one.

Well, with a nod to all of YPG's maintenance personnel, I hope all the Army's new equipment will be more reliable than my dishwasher. That being said, it's time I get off my soap-box and wrap this up before my new computer takes a... [pop].

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A solemn farewell to former President George H. W. Bush



Overcast skies and light drizzle underscored the solemnity as scores of YPG personnel and Price Elementary School students bid farewell to former President George H.W. Bush with a 21-gun salute in the afternoon on Cox Field on December 6. In keeping with Army protocol, a 50-gun salute took place at retreat that same evening. Former President Bush was the last president to visit the proving ground: he conducted a parachute jump here in March 1997, his first since serving as a Naval aviator in World War II. (Photos by Mark Schauer)



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T-11 parachute sleeve improvements tested at YPG

By Mark Schauer

Mass combat jumps have taken place in virtually every large-scale deployment of American forces since World War II.

The tactic is particularly useful for seizing isolated air fields deep behind enemy lines, which can then be used to receive and deploy more troops and armaments.

In any large-scale deployment of American Soldiers, paratroopers play a crucial role, and the T-11 personnel parachute offers jumpers a slow and stable descent, especially in high winds, and can support more weight than previous parachutes, a crucial advantage for warfighters who carry heavy gear.

Also, since the T-11's canopy deploys slowly and further away from the aircraft than preceding parachutes, the Army was able to increase the gross cargo weight of a C-17 aircraft by 15,000 pounds, which allows the aircraft to safely carry more fuel or cargo. In the early 2000s, the T-11

underwent extensive developmental testing at YPG that proved it extraordinarily capable.

There is always room for improvement, however, and the T-11 was recently back at YPG for testing of an improved deployment sleeve, a long cotton encasement for the parachute's 1,670 square foot canopy and controls its opening during a static line drop: when a paratrooper jumps from an airplane, the static line the jumper is attached to pulls the deployment bag from the container and elongates the canopy. The sleeve is then pulled off of the canopy, which inflates and stabilizes. An intact sleeve controls the inflation of the canopy and reduces the opening shock on the jumper, which makes for a safer deployment and descent. Being made of fabric, however, the



The T-11 parachute offers Army jumpers a slow and stable descent, especially in high winds, and can support more weight than previous parachutes, a crucial advantage for warfighters who carry robust, but heavy gear. The T-11 underwent extensive developmental testing at YPG that proved it extraordinarily capable. (Photo by Mark Schauer)

sleeves could possibly be affected by inclement weather as Soldiers deploy to some of the world's most extreme environments.

"We can't stop it from getting wet, but we can use a material that isn't susceptible to mold, mildew, and shrinkage," said Keith Allen, test officer. "The idea is to design a sleeve that still functions the same, but can prevent these things."

Most of the tests are conducted by harnessing the parachute under evaluation to a torso mannequin with stubs for arms. The mannequins are ballasted with weight, then loaded onto an aluminum deployment rack specially designed and constructed by YPG engineers that is loaded into the cargo bay of a C-17 or C-130 cargo plane.

"We're testing the hypothesis that

there is no deployment performance difference in the canopy when we add the new sleeve," said Allen. "We're validating that the component upgrade won't negatively impact the performance of the system."

Whether dropped out of the aircraft's troop doors or off the ramp, the mannequins stay oriented vertically from the very beginning of the drop, just as a live jumper would. The mannequins are then dropped several at a time from the troop doors on successive passes over the isolated drop zone. Video data is collected during descent at this time, and the testers keep a keen eye on the impact locations.

"The main metric isn't opening shock, its altitude loss to deployment: How far below the aircraft does the chute open and stabilize? That's

more important than opening shock, and that's what we're focusing on."

To ensure the sleeves aren't damaged before they can be examined, testers must recover the parachutes as soon as the final drop is complete. After each drop, the testers examine the sleeves for rips, friction burns and broken strands of thread, and meticulously record any finding of each. The testers and recovery crew then fold and pack the parachutes into kit bags, which are loaded with the heavy mannequins onto the backs of large trucks. Back at the air delivery building, they are prepared for another drop.

YPG is home to all manner of parachute testing, with spacious and instrumented ranges large enough to accommodate even the world's largest cargo parachutes.

Army integrates artificial intelligence and machine learning for electronic warfare

By Nancy Jones-Bonbreast

After hosting an open online challenge to find the best algorithms to assist Electronic Warfare Officers (EWOs) in sifting through the increasing complexity of signal detection on the battlefield, the Army is now applying that technology to EW systems and operations.

The new artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) prototypes are being inserted into electronic warfare systems and will be in the hands of select operational units as early as August.

“When the Army delivered electronic warfare prototypes to Soldiers in Europe earlier this year, we enhanced the sensor footprint for EWOs to track friendly and enemy signals, but we also increased the amount of data they were seeing,” said Rob Monto, the director of the Army Rapid Capabilities Office (RCO) Emerging Technologies Office. “That data, which comes from commercial Wi-Fi, cell phones and satellites as well as military systems, is continuously increasing. So we wanted to look at what emerging technologies could be applied to help Soldiers filter to what matters and speed up the operational response.”

To quickly identify the leading technology available, the Army RCO hosted the Signal Classification Challenge, which concluded in August 2018. The 90-day challenge attracted more than 150 participants and resulted in prize money totaling \$150,000 for the top three winners. Ultimately, the Army leveraged a prize-based acquisition approach that yielded AI models capable of efficiently generating AI/ML algorithms trained for a specific problem.

Now, the RCO is working on a series of data collection and technical exchange events that will fur-

ther evaluate the performance and integration of the AI/ML applications for product development and deployment. The various technical approaches discovered through the prior competition are improving the accuracy of current algorithms. Already, the team has integrated an AI framework into the sensor processing hardware for the Army’s Tactical Electronic Warfare System (TEWS), with the concept that this framework can be scaled to additional Army platforms and systems.

Next, the RCO will work with select vendors and EWOs during an operational evaluation that includes data generation, collection and algorithm testing at Yuma Proving Ground. The event, planned for ear-

ly-to-mid 2019, will lead to fielding the new technology to an operational unit later in the year.

“This is an example of harnessing AI and ML to meet a very specific need,” Monto said. “The top submissions showed very novel approaches to utilizing today’s emerging tech to accurately classify signals, and we decided to move forward in getting them to the field for feedback from the Soldiers who use the equipment.”

While the EWOs will remain as the lead for identifying signals of interest and analyzing their impact, the use of AI and ML could help them quickly and accurately detect patterns, identify signals of interest, filter out unwanted signal noise and paint a picture of the electromagnetic

spectrum, providing a form of “AI overwatch.” Along with automating aspects of the signal classification process using AI, another objective of the project is to promote reusability of the technology across the services by developing AI algorithm training pipelines and putting in place sustainment capabilities specific to the EW domain.

The idea for the Signal Classification Challenge stemmed from the Army’s delivery of its first electronic warfare systems for brigade and below in response to an operational needs statement from U.S. Army Europe. The RCO rapidly prototyped and delivered the systems in partnership with the Project Manager for Electronic Warfare & Cyber.



Stryker crewmen with the 1st Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment (2CR) fire an M1128 Mobile Gun System during a joint combined-arms live-fire exercise in Poland. The 2CR was one of the first units to receive the Army’s electronic warfare prototypes. Now, the Rapid Capabilities Office is testing new technologies that apply artificial intelligence and machine learning to paint a picture of the electromagnetic spectrum. (Photo by Sgt. John Onuoha)

2018 Somerton Tamale Festival includes YPG flavor



Tamales are an integral part of the desert Southwest's culinary and social fabric, and Somerton's annual Tamale Festival, now in its 12th year, is a venerable part of Yuma County's annual event schedule. For the first time ever, Soldiers from YPG came to talk with festival-goers about what they do, show off their gear, and even let youngsters of all ages get up close and personal with the all-terrain variant of the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle. Among the event's founders are YPG test officers Carlos Anaya and Arturo Anaya. (Photos by Casey Garcia)

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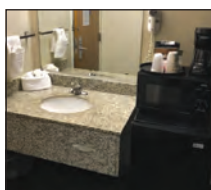
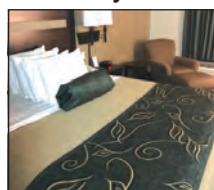
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A very YPG Christmas



Dynamic holiday celebrations abounded at YPG in December, starting with the 'Jingle Jog' walk/run where Soldiers and civilians dashed 1.5 miles, receiving a 2018 Jingle Jog Christmas tree ornament from Recreation Supervisor Steve Ward upon completion. YPG's annual Christmas Tree Lighting was as full of merriment as usual: here, Family Support Division Chief Mardy Clark helps a youngster put one final touch on the tree. Days later, representatives of American Legion Post #19 donated about 20 Christmas baskets with all the trimmings to YPG Soldiers as a small token of appreciation for their service to the nation, and Command Sgt. Maj. Jamathon Nelson lends a hand distributing them. The Yuma 50 military support group also included gift cards in the baskets. (Photos by Casey Garcia)



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