

# The Outpost

U.S. ARMY YUMA PROVING GROUND, YUMA, ARIZONA 85365

VOLUME 73 NO. 15 AUGUST 05, 2024

## Yuma Test Center welcomes new commander

By Ana Henderson

Yuma Test Center (YTC) welcomed new Commander Lt. Col. Kevin Hicks.

Outgoing YTC Commander Lt. Col. Shane Dering relinquished command to Hicks on the morning of July 18, 2024, during a change of command ceremony at Yuma Proving Ground's (YPG) Palm Garden Conference Center.

YPG Commander Col. John Nelson, Dering, Hicks and Airborne Test Force (ATF) Master Sgt. Donald Bullock performed the ceremonial passing of the guidon which symbolizes the passing of power.

Witnesses to the momentous occasion included Yuma city and county leaders, two former YPG colonels and Marine Corps Air Station Commander Col. Jared Stone. The YTC workforce filled the

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Lt. Col. Shane Dering relinquished command of Yuma Test Center to Lt. Col. Kevin Hicks during a change of command ceremony at Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) on July 18, 2024. YPG Commander Col. John Nelson, Hicks, Dering and Airborne Test Force Master Sgt. Donald Bullock performed the ceremonial passing of the guidon which symbolizes the passing of power. (Photo by Ana Henderson)



Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs visits Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) on July 24, 2024. YPG Commander Col. John Nelson provides a capabilities brief to demonstrate the scope of testing at YPG. Yuma Test Center Commander Lt. Col. Kevin Hicks (left) and Yuma Mayor Douglas Nicholls (right) attend the brief as well. (Photo by Mark Schauer)

## Arizona Governor visits U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground

By Mark Schauer

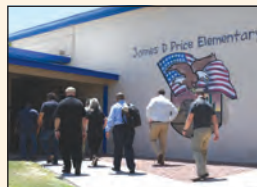
Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs paid a visit to U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) on July 25, 2024, the first sitting governor to visit the post in more than two decades.

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# Military Freefall School welcomes new commander

By Ana Henderson

The Military Freefall School (MFFS) located at Yuma Proving Ground (YPG), welcomed a new commander on the morning of July 11, 2024.

Outgoing Commander Maj. Nicholas Garver who held the position for the last three years relinquished command to Maj. Matthew Morneault.

Lt. Col. Nicholas Manghelli Commander of the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Special Warfare Training Group and MFFS Company Sergeant Major, Sgt. Maj. Matthew Krueger welcomed Morneault, his wife Amanda and their four children.

During the ceremony, Krueger passed the guidon to outgoing commander Garver, who then passed it to Manghelli. Manghelli passed the guidon to incoming commander Morneault to symbolize the change in leadership. Morneault's wife Amanda was given a bouquet of roses to welcome her to the command as well.

In his outgoing speech, Garver



On July 11, 2024, Maj. Nicholas Garver relinquished command of the Military Freefall School (MFFS) to Maj. Matthew Morneault. The MFFS is based at Yuma Proving Ground and falls under the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. (Photos by Ana Henderson)

said, "The command team you have now all the way up through the echelons is the best I have ever seen it."

He also thanked YPG and the flight detachment for their ongoing support.

Morneault in his first official

speech to the unit said, "It's an honor to be blessed with the opportunity to be leading this unit and to command the Military Freefall School."

He thanked Garver for the best handover in his career and asked the team to show their appreciation to him after the ceremony.

The MFFS falls under the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School based at Fort Liberty, North Carolina.



## The Outpost

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## YPG Airborne Test Force Officer in Charge retires



U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground's Airborne Test Force bid a fond farewell to Chief Warrant Officer 3 David Perry on June 20, 2024. (Photo by Eugene Garcia)

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# Yuma's first Army JROTC program led by former MFFS Officer

By Mark Schauer

The Army's presence in what is now Yuma County dates back to the 1840s.

Until now, however, the community has never had an Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program.

That changes on August 1, when the first Army JROTC program at Yuma High School begins with more than 100 cadets.

The program's Senior Army Instructor is James Branch, a retired Major who served at the Military Freefall School (MFFS) at Yuma Proving Ground between 2011 and 2013, first as executive officer, then as commander. He had previously trained as a student in the school's basic course in 2009.

"I still miss it," said Branch of the MFFS. "It is one of the most awesome, fulfilling jobs there is."

At the conclusion of his 22-year Army career that saw multiple deployments during the Global War on Terror, Branch and his family settled in Yuma. He worked in the private sector for several years before landing his current position.

"I saw the job posting and thought it would be a great way to continue to serve," he said. "I got really involved with coaching basketball and flag football with my kids and realized I really enjoy mentoring and helping kids grow up into great adults."

Yuma High's Army JROTC program promises to be a rigorous elective that requires cadets to maintain a respectable grade point average across all their classes in order to participate in the program's extracurricular activities. From air rifle and drill teams to academic and physical fitness competitions, maintaining good grades allows a cadet to travel across Arizona competing against their counterparts in other high schools.

Though successfully completing three or four years of the program



Maj. James Branch (center) talks with baseball great Cecil Fielder (left) during a visit to the Military Freefall School at U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground on June 14, 2012. Branch, who was the freefall school's executive officer at that time, is today the Senior Army Instructor of Yuma, Arizona's first Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps. (Photo by Mark Schauer)

allows a cadet to enter the Army as a Private First Class (E3), Branch stresses that students with no intention of joining the military when they come of age can also benefit from participating in the program.

"JROTC is not a recruiting tool of the Army or the Department of Defense," he said. "Some cadets do go on to join the military, but they also go on to be very successful in

college or the civilian world with the discipline and leadership they learn in the program."

Once the program is mature, the senior cadets will be organized in an Army-like battalion staff who will largely run the program with the instructors' oversight and guidance. Since all of the cadets are new as the program launches, the course will be significantly more instructor driven.

"Getting the new cadets into

the program and to buy in to the culture and discipline associated with JROTC will be the biggest hurdle," said Branch. "As the program progresses and the cadets come back for the second, third and fourth years, we'll have students there to help out with building the culture and guiding freshmen and sophomores in the right direction."

Branch intends for the cadets to participate in various local ceremonies and other community service once the program is launched, which he believes will lead to even more support and participation.

"Army JROTC is a really good program that speaks for itself once you see it in action," said Branch. "Once the cadets are out in the community, I think we'll have a lot more students coming to partake in the program."

Scan the QR code with your phone's camera to listen to Branch's podcast interview.



## S1 STEM outreach team visits AWC summer camp



The Yuma Proving Ground S1 Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Outreach team attends Arizona Western College's 2024 Summer Migrant Bridge to Success. The program targets 100-125 migrant students entering 6, 7 and 8th grade. Hailey Vergara, Teresa Elizalde, Tracy Haifley, Micheal Ochoa, and Sarah Hogan hosted a STEM Vehicle Acceptance activity for students. (Photos by Ana Henderson)



A group representing various agencies who make up a Federal Evaluation Team visit James D. Price Elementary School on July 2, 2024, to assess the school and discuss the needs of the new school. Yuma Elementary School District 1 is applying for a federal grant to help with funding the replacement of the elementary school at Yuma Proving Ground.



The group view the location just north of Price where the replacement school will be built. Plans include a kitchen to prepare hot lunches (which the current school does not have), a larger auditorium for indoor structured activities and dedicated art and music rooms. (Photos by Ana Henderson)

## James D. Price Elementary School replacement update

By Ana Henderson

Yuma Elementary School District 1 (YESD 1) is applying for a federal grant to help with funding the replacement of James D. Price Elementary School which was built in 1953 at Yuma Proving Ground (YPG).

A group representing various

agencies who made up a Federal Evaluation Team visited the elementary school on July 2, 2024, to assess the school and discuss the needs of the new school. Both YPG Garrison and Command leaderships attended.

During the visit, the team made up of representatives from the

Department of the Army, YESD1, the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC) and the principal architect, saw the ceiling in various classrooms where leaks occurred and visited the temporary classrooms being used while the ceiling repairs are made. They toured classrooms

making note of the single-pane windows and the loud buzzing a rooftop air conditioner makes in the classrooms. Finally, they viewed the location just north of Price where the new school will be built.

The team discussed the planned improvements for the school, such as a kitchen to prepare hot lunches (which the current school does not have) as well as a larger auditorium for indoor structured activities and dedicated art and music rooms. The school will also have a more modern layout, to improve security and the overall student experience.

Following this visit the school district will begin the grant application process.

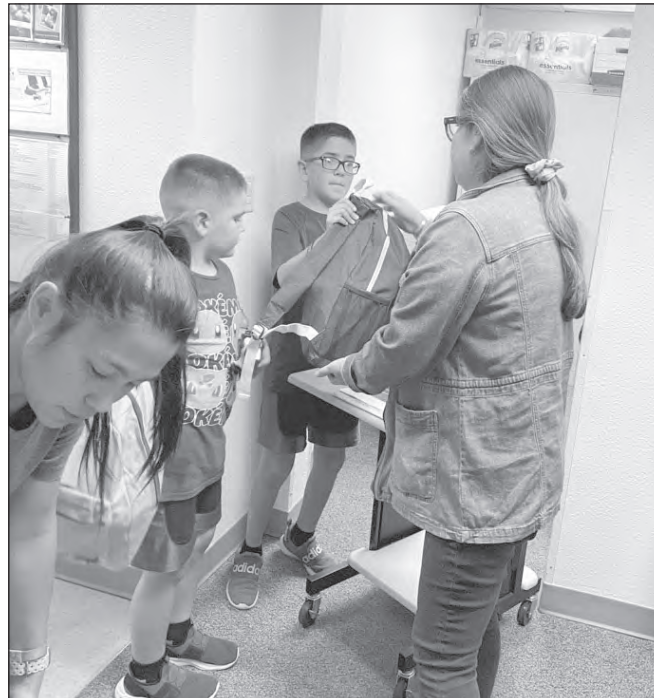
### Grant process:

- The grant approval process takes about three months and will be complete before Sept. 30, 2024, to compete with other projects for this cycle.

- If the grant is awarded, it will be announced by an Arizona congressman or senator.

- If the grant is awarded, the OLDCC team will return to YPG to conduct a kickoff meeting and discuss details about the execution of the grant funds to YESD1 and the timeline for the design and construction of the new school.

## Operation Homefront provides backpacks and supplies to children of Soldiers



School bells around the nation are ringing this week and Operation Homefront and Yuma Proving Ground's Army Community Services (ACS) ensured children of those who are serving or have served our nation are well-equipped. On July 18, 2024, ACS gave away 60 backpack and supplies to military dependents going into grades kindergarten through 12th. (Photos by Mariah Boykin)

# Yuma Test Center Employees of the Quarter

— Mission Support —



**Name:** Shawn Devoe  
**Years of service:** 2 years  
**Job title:** Range Control Lead  
**Recognition:** Civilian Service Achievement Medal  
**Reaction:** “I’m honored to be part of YTC and to have been recognized as Employee of the Quarter! It was truly a surprise that was kept well hidden from me until the day of. I will continue to strive for excellence and support the YPG Team.”

Former Yuma Test Center Commander Lt. Col. Shane Dering presents Shawn Devoe with a Civilian Service Achievement Medal on July 2, 2024, for being selected as the Mission Support Employee of the Third Quarter for fiscal year 2024. (Photo by Mark Schauer)

— Mission —



**Name:** Jeffrey McNierney  
**Years of service:** 14 years (includes time as a contractor)  
**Job title:** Munitions and Weapons Test Officer  
**Recognition:** Civilian Service Achievement Medal  
**Reaction:** “I am so happy to be named the YTC Mission Employee of the Quarter. I love working on things that make the news and meeting people that have a lot of impact on people’s lives.”

Former Yuma Test Center Commander Lt. Col. Shane Dering presents Jeffrey McNierney with a Civilian Service Achievement Medal on July 16, 2024, for being selected as the Mission Employee of the Third Quarter for fiscal year 2024. (Photo by Ana Henderson)



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The Joint C-sUAS Office established in 2020 has hosted industry demonstrations of the latest C-sUAS technology at U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground for the past three years. Their most recent event was the most ambitious yet, focusing on demonstrating systems capable of detecting and defeating swarms of sUAS. (U.S. Army photos)



"We have up to 50 targets in the air simultaneously," said Hi-Sing Silen, test integration manager for the Joint C-sUAS Office. "Those include rotary-wing, fixed-wing, fast-mover jet engines and propeller-driven group threes, all coming at you from almost 360 degrees. It is as hard as it can be for a system trying to defend itself."

## C-sUAS demo returns to U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground

By Mark Schauer

The U.S. military has used unmanned aircraft for decades to perform dangerous reconnaissance and attack missions that save lives, but the importance of small, unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS) is growing with each passing year.

As the technology proliferates, America's adversaries could potentially use sUAS to target U.S. service members, necessitating robust counter-sUAS (C-sUAS) defenses for use anywhere American forces may be deployed.

The Joint C-sUAS Office (JCO), established in 2020 to tackle this threat, has hosted industry demonstrations of the latest C-sUAS technology at U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) for the past three years. Their most recent event, the fifth held here, took place over four weeks in June, and was the most ambitious yet, focusing on demonstrating systems capable of detecting and defeating swarms of sUAS. Of nearly 60 proposals, 12 systems were selected for

demonstration by the JCO, and nine participated here.

"We have up to 50 targets in the air simultaneously," said Hi-Sing Silen, test integration manager for the JCO. "Those include rotary-wing, fixed-wing, fast-mover jet engines and propeller-driven group threes, all coming at you from almost 360 degrees. It is as hard as it can be for a system trying to defend itself."

The event is believed to be among the largest demonstrations using a mass sUAS attack scenario conducted to date.

"As far as I'm tracking, this is the first time the DOD has flown this many threat targets in the air at one time," said Silen. "In other swarm demonstrations I have seen or heard about, you either have waves of incoming threats or they are coming one after another. In our scenario, you have 50 threats converging on your position at almost the same time."

The methods to detect, track and identify threats differed by vendor,

as did defeat mechanisms, which included machine guns and rockets, high-powered microwave and electronic warfare systems. Some vendors provided kinetic interceptor drone-on-drone defeats, or combined aspects of other mechanisms.

"Some systems have small arms as part of their hard kill, but also have electronic warfare capabilities they can use," said Silen. "There is no one silver bullet in defending against threat UAS, especially when they are swarms. You have to have a layered defense to be able to fend off all the threats we are giving the systems."

The testers watched for any anomalies and took extensive notes on each of the individual systems. The most recent demonstrations also attracted observers from c-UAS programs who were hoping to gain insights that might be useful to other aspects of advancing technology to defend against the sUAS threat.

"There is definitely a lot of push to support our allies and be sure we are coming up with good systems," said Silen. "In addition to the nine

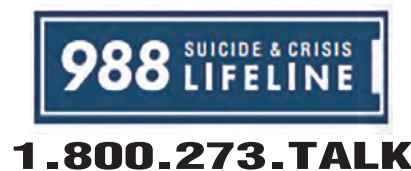
vendors participating in the counter swarm demonstration, there are also seven U.S. government-sponsored systems observing and collecting data."

YPG's clear, stable air and extremely dry climate, along with vast institutional UAS testing knowledge, makes it an attractive location to testers, as does the ability to control a large swath of the radio frequency spectrum. YPG has more than 500 permanent radio frequencies, and several thousand temporary ones in a given month.

"There are other places where this is possible, but from my perspective it would be a harder lift on my end to coordinate with new people who haven't dealt with the speed and agility of JCO demonstrations before," said Silen. "The test is so complex because every week has new vendors coming in, so every week is essentially a new test. With the help of the test officers at YPG, we can safely execute it and have a plan to collect the data. The support is always top notch."



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# COMMANDER

FROM PAGE 1

room as they showed their gratitude for their former leader and support for their new leader.

Dering's wife Jessica and their baby son sat by his side supporting his final moments at YTC. Hicks' wife, Ashley, their four children, his mother Connie and his father retired Lt. Col. K.D. Hicks showed their support, and each received a small token of gratitude on behalf of the command.

YTC is YPG's extreme hot weather testing center which tests equipment for the Department of Defense and its allies. YPG's Commander remarked, "The feedback I received time and again when I go out to the range is that Lt. Col. Dering fostered an environment that allowed them to do their job unimpeded and they thoroughly enjoyed coming to work each and every day."

Nelson noted that Dering led the successful execution of over 580 tests during his two years as commander.

In his departing speech, Dering said, "The test center mission, the workforce, and the community here in Yuma all made this the most rewarding assignment I have had in



Outgoing Yuma Test Center Commander Lt. Col. Shane Dering relinquished command to Lt. Col. Kevin Hicks on the morning of July 18, 2024. Yuma Proving Ground Commander Col. John Nelson, Dering, Hicks and Airborne Test Force Master Sgt. Donald Bullock performed the ceremonial passing of the guidon. (Photos by Ana Henderson)

my 20 years."

He went on to say, "I jump out of bed every morning to serve alongside our wonderful workforce. Dedicated professionals serving their nation, making that long drive up 95. Sometimes only to get into a GSA and then drive another hour just to start your workday. It has been an honor to serve alongside each of you."

During his incoming speech, Hicks told the crowd, "To be selected for



Yuma Test Center (YTC) welcomed new Commander Lt. Col. Kevin Hicks on July 18, 2024, during a change of command ceremony. Witnesses to the momentous occasion included Yuma city and county leaders, two former YPG colonels and Marine Corps Air Station Commander Col. Jared Stone. The YTC workforce filled the room as they showed their gratitude for their former leader and support for their new leader.

this command is an incredible honor and privilege and to be entrusted to command Yuma Test Center, the Army's premier extreme weather testing center is the highest honor. I am humbled to take the reins of leadership from Shane and honored to be part of the team."

Also, instrumental to the ceremony were YPG Chaplain Maj. Ryan Pearse who performed the invocation, YPG employee Carlos Garcia who sang the National Anthem, Fight Services Director Patrick Franklin who severed as the as the Master of Ceremonies, ATF Soldiers Staff Sgt. Stephen Moss and Sgt. Christian Ramirez who presented the flowers and coins to the families.



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# Yuma Test Center team lead honored by Yuma Police Department

By Mark Schauer

Heroes are commonly anonymous in their daily life, but eventually get found out for at least some of their good deeds.

For Rick Ramirez, team lead for wheeled vehicles at U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground's (YPG) Maintenance Test Branch, recognition came on July 25, 2024, more than a year after a particular act of heroism.

A Marine Corps veteran who deployed to Operation Desert Storm, Ramirez and his wife were on their way to enjoy a Saturday brunch out on Jan. 23, 2023.

While driving eastbound past the intersection of Fourth Avenue and 16th Street in Yuma he saw a man strike a police officer outside the Taco Bell on Fourth. He diverted and cut across the westbound lanes of traffic to approach through the adjacent dirt parking lot to see if the officer, now grappling with the suspect, needed help.



On July 25, 2024, Yuma Police Department (YPD) Chief Thomas Garrity made a trip to U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) to recognize Rick Ramirez for helping a YPD officer struggling with a suspect in Yuma in January 2023. (Left to right) Yuma Mayor Douglas Nicholls, Garrity, YPD Officer Chris Little, Ramirez, Yuma Test Center Lt. Col. Kevin Hicks, YPG Commander Col. John Nelson. (Photo by Ana Henderson)

"I asked the officer because I didn't want to get involved if he didn't have any trouble, but he said

no, he needed assistance," recalled Ramirez. "I assisted him getting the suspect handled so he could cuff him."

As other police cars arrived on the scene, Ramirez and his wife left.

"I figured he had plenty of backup now, so we went on about our business and had our brunch," said Ramirez.

The Yuma Police Department, however, saw the assistance rendered as a more significant act than Ramirez did. Discovering that he worked at YPG, the department wanted to confer a formal certificate

of recognition on him at his place of duty. Ramirez's teammates set up bleachers in the work bay of their building to accommodate visitors that included the YPG Commander Col. John Nelson, Yuma Test Center Commander Lt. Col. Kevin Hicks, Yuma Mayor Douglas Nicholls, and Yuma Police Department Chief Thomas Garrity. Keeping the purpose of the event secret from Ramirez, he unwittingly helped with the preparations.

"It's been so long ago, I thought this whole event was for Miss Hobbs who was in town yesterday," said Ramirez.

"He went over a year without saying anything—that humility combined with courage is just incredible," said Hicks. "It just shows what YPG is known for, which is hard work, dedication, and doing what's right. Mr. Ramirez saw a wrong that day and wanted to make it right."

The high praise was echoed by officials from the City of Yuma.

"I appreciate your engagement and stepping forward when you didn't have to, but you did anyway," said Nicholls in remarks at the ceremony. "That means a lot to me and to the community."

"It was nice to get some recognition," said Ramirez after the ceremony. "I don't know how they found me—they have good detectives, I guess. It was definitely a surprise."

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## Halo Chapel hosts VBS



Vacation Bible School made a splash at the Halo Chapel at Yuma Proving Ground (YPG). On the morning of July 22, 2024, nearly 50 eager children filled the chapel for the weeklong camp. This year's theme is, "Scuba diving into friendship with God." Nearly 30 volunteers helped YPG Chaplain Maj. Ryan Pearse including Soldiers with the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers program and teens and adults from the YPG community. (Photos by Ana Henderson)

## Army Community Services celebrates 59 years of helping



Yuma Proving Ground's Army Community Services which provides various human and health services celebrated it's 59 years of service with an open house on July 25, 2025. The team used the opportunity to educate the community about the resources they provide. (Photos courtesy of Army Community Services)

## Family Advocacy Program reaches out to community



Earlier that same week, the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) staff hosted a "Christmas in July" outreach event where they visited popular places in the community. FAP staff provided swag bags with pamphlets. FAP Manager Mariah Boykin said, "I had a good time meeting all the people that I have only spoken to on the phone." (Photos courtesy of FAP)

## YPG interns recognized with luncheon



Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) hosted an internship appreciation luncheon for the sixteen student interns who spent their time at the test center this summer. YPG Commander Col. John Nelson and Yuma Test Center Lt. Col. Kevin Hicks joined the group as they talked about what they worked on and learned during their internship. YPG's internship program, run by Patricia Conley in the Manpower and Workforce Development Division, currently selects students and recent graduates from seven different programs. (Photo by Ana Henderson)

# GOVERNOR

FROM PAGE 1

YPG Commander Col. John Nelson and Yuma Test Center Commander Lt. Col. Kevin Hicks escorted Hobbs on an overflight of the post's ranges and visits to a vehicle test and the Military Freefall School's (MFFS) wind tunnel.

"I think it is an excellent opportunity for us to demonstrate for the governor what we do here at YPG for Army modernization, joint service modernization, and for our international partners who test here," said Nelson. "It's also an opportunity to identify and demonstrate some of the areas of cooperation and collaboration that we have with local, state, and federal officials in order to make our mission happen."

Nelson started the visit with a comprehensive briefing for Hobbs that was attended by YPG senior leaders, as well as Yuma Mayor Douglas Nicholls.

"YPG is a jewel of Yuma with



LEFT: Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs visits Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) on July 24, 2024, and visits a vehicle test course to view a M1 Abrams Main Battle Tank and meet the workforce who test the vehicle. (Photo by Mark Schauer) RIGHT: Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs receives a Command overview brief from YPG Col. John Nelson. He highlights the testing capabilities of YPG, Yuma Test Center and its tenant units such as the Military Freefall School pictured. (Photo by Ana Henderson)



great local and national impact which can only begin to be understood by visiting it," said Nicholls. "It was great to have Governor Hobbs here to see all of YPG's great work and dramatic impact."

"The mayor's presence this morning reinforced it is important to Yuma, but also the entire state," said Hobbs. "I focus a lot on job creation and a lot of those jobs are in aerospace in

defense, and right here is where we are seeing those put into action."

After the briefing, the governor visited one of YPG's more than 200 miles of vehicle testing courses to see a test of a M1 Abrams Main Battle Tank, then took an overflight of a portion of the post's nearly 1,200 square mile range. She concluded the tour with a visit to the MFFS vertical wind tunnel with briefings from

MFFS Commander Maj. Matthew Morneault and Sgt. Maj. Matthew Krueger.

"All of the military installations we have in our state are so critical to the economy, and I want to make sure as governor that the state is being a good partner," said Hobbs. "Every time I visit a military installation, it reinforces how critical Arizona is to our national defense and security."

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