

The Outpost

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

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Yuma celebrates Army's 250th Birthday with free public event

By Mark Schauer

Yuma's Colorado River State Historic Park, which was an Army Quartermaster Depot from 1869 to 1884, hosted a free public event for the Army's 250th birthday, and U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) was there.

The celebration, in planning for more than six months, was spearheaded by park director Tammy Snook with the support of the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area that oversees the facility.

The event, which ran from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., drew crowds in the high hundreds before record temperatures hit Yuma in force.

"I wasn't surprised, but I have to



On June 14, 2025, Yuma's Colorado River State Historic Park, originally an Army Quartermaster Depot from 1869 to 1884, hosted a free public event for the Army's 250th birthday, and U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) was there. Some key moments included YPG Commander Col. John Nelson and Sgt. Briana Corona performing the customary cutting of the Army birthday cake and Nelson swearing in Army recruits. (Photos by Mark Schauer and Elisa Reitman)

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LEFT: Army Ranger Hall of Fame inductee Jeff Struecker addresses a capacity crowd at U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground's Halo Chapel on June 4, 2025. Before going to seminary and being commissioned as an Army chaplain, Struecker received a Silver Star for his actions at the Battle of Mogadishu famously portrayed in *Black Hawk Down*. CENTER: Army Ranger Hall of Fame inductee Jeff Struecker addresses a capacity crowd at U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground's Halo Chapel. RIGHT: Army Ranger Hall of Fame inductee Jeff Struecker (left) signs books for attendees in the Fellowship Hall of U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground's Halo Chapel prior to his presentation. Religious services have been a source of strength and solace to Soldiers in all conflicts, and Struecker's ministry has resonated for decades within the Army. (Photos by Mark Schauer)

Battle of Mogadishu veteran speaks at Halo Chapel

By Mark Schauer

Full pews at the U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) Halo Chapel greeted Army Ranger Hall of Fame inductee Jeff Struecker as he made a highly anticipated presentation the evening of June 4.

Before going to seminary and being commissioned as an Army chaplain, Struecker received a Silver Star for his actions at the Battle of Mogadishu famously portrayed in *Black Hawk Down*.

What began on Oct. 3, 1993 as a straightforward helicopter raid to capture two high-ranking lieutenants of a brutal Somali warlord became the longest and deadliest sustained firefight American forces had engaged in since the Vietnam War. The intense overnight battle between American forces and thousands of Somali National Alliance members and volunteer insurgents armed with AK-47s and rocket propelled grenades resulted in 18 American

dead and more than 80 seriously wounded.

Then-Sgt. Jeff Struecker was the squad leader in the lead High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle in a ground support convoy that ended up extracting the wounded, making multiple trips through harrowing fusillades of enemy fire. The famously intense movie adaptation of the book '*Black Hawk Down*' didn't fully capture the unrelenting violence American forces encountered. When machine gunner Sgt. Dominick Pilla was killed by enemy gunfire inches behind Struecker during the first casualty extraction, Struecker told attendees an earnest prayer in the worst moment of his life steadied him to return into the crucible again and again to seek out more American wounded. It eventually inspired him to become an Army chaplain. By the time of his retirement in 2011, he had made 17 combat deployments in conflicts ranging from the capture of Manuel Noriega in Panama in 1989 to multiple deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

YPG Chaplain (Maj.) Ryan Pearse, who formerly worked for Struecker, made extensive efforts to bring him to the chapel and publicize his visit to the broader Yuma community.

"He's got a great story, and I just wanted people to hear that story," said Pearse. "He's a great speaker with a

great testimony: I've heard it before, but I was excited to hear it again."

Religious services have been a source of strength and solace to Soldiers in all conflicts, and Struecker's ministry has resonated for decades within the Army. James Branch, a retired Army Maj. and former commander of the Military Freefall School at YPG who today leads Yuma High School's Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, attended the event because he had Struecker as a chaplain while serving in Afghanistan in 2002.

"His sermons were awesome," said Branch. "He was the most highly decorated chaplain I've ever seen. He made a big impression, for sure."

Army veteran and current Yuma City Councilman Mark Martinez, an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran and Bronze Star recipient, missed the event due to a city council meeting taking place simultaneously, but has long admired Struecker's writings. A friend obtained an autographed copy of one of Struecker's books for him at a meet-and-greet opportunity in the chapel's fellowship hall for attendees prior to his presentation.

"We always said a prayer before we left the wire, and I think it's because of Mr. Struecker," said Martinez. "He's an inspiration for Soldiers that go downrange. He made it okay to pray—I can't appreciate him enough."

The Outpost

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News may be submitted to:

The Editor, Outpost, Yuma Proving Ground, Yuma, AZ, 85365

Phone: (928) 328-6149 or DSN 899

Visit our website at: www.yuma.army.mil

or email to: ana.c.henderson.civ@army.mil

Commander: Col. John Nelson

Public Affairs Officer: Mark Schauer

Public Affairs Specialist/Outpost Editor: Ana Henderson

Visual Information Manager: Eugene Garcia

Cold Regions Test Center Photographer: Sebastian Saarloos



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Ultra-competitive employees complete 250 Challenge in marathon session

By Ana Henderson

U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) employees Ryan Ingham and Harley Hogan took the YPG Fitness Center's 250 Army Birthday Challenge to another level.

The fitness challenge is one of the many ways YPG commemorated the Army's 250th

birthday on June 14, 2025. The YPG Fitness Center created the challenge which involved repetitions of 250 squats, lunges, step-ups, push-ups, 250-meter swim and medicine ball carry, and 2500-meter row and 25 miles running/biking/walking challenges.

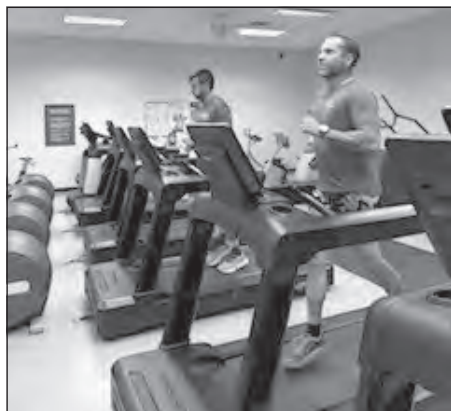
While most of the 30 people who sign up for the challenge spent the time from June 1 –14 to complete the challenge, the ultra-motivated and competitive athletes completed the challenge in one visit to the YPG Fitness Center.

"If I was going to do it, I just wanted to do it in one shot. Just knock it all out instead of two weeks," said Ingham who came up with the idea. It took zero convincing to get his buddy on board.

"I enjoy challenges like that, so I was like, 'Yeah let's do it,'" recalled Hogan.

The men who have both completed in ultra-marathons did nothing extra to physically prepare. However, they did take the day off work because while the Army's Fitness Program allows them time to work out during the workday, one hour was not enough.

Ingham estimated it would take



U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) employees Ryan Ingham and Harley Hogan took the YPG Fitness Center's 250 Army Birthday Challenge to another level. The ultra motivated and competitive athletes completed the challenge in one six-hour visit to the YPG Fitness Center. (Photos by Dani Compton)

them six to eight hours to complete so the two met up at 7 a.m. on June 3 at the YPG Fitness Center and started the challenge with a plan.

"I thought the easiest would be to break it up in rounds. So, 25 rounds with 10 reps of each of the workouts. When we needed a break, we would jump on the rower or the ball carry," explained Ingham.

Even when they were heading to the restroom, they were efficient with their time.

"When we went to the bathroom we carried the medicine ball, across the gym. Drop, go to the bathroom, grab it, take it back," recounted Ingham.

As luck would have it, the AC was not functioning that day, but they did not let that slow them down.

Hogan shared, "The lunch workout crew came in there and then it got even hotter, and there was no AC, so we stopped and went to the pool."

The two didn't need to exchange motivational words or smack talk each other Hogan said, "I think motivation is just seeing someone else finish something and you're like 'alright I got to keep going.'"

Co-workers swung by to provide support and check their progress

and Fitness Facility Manager, Dani Compton, documented their challenge with photos.

When asked about the most challenging part of the marathon workout session Hogan said, "None of the workouts were any harder than the rest." They both agreed that the stopping and going became a challenge.

Ingham explained, "Toward the end getting on and off the treadmill because you start to tighten up from the workout portion. It takes a little bit to start flowing again, and then once you start flowing, you don't want to stop. So, towards the end I started running two miles at a time and then I would do my reps."

They both finished the challenge in just over six hours and confirmed, their knees, feet and entire bodies did not hurt following the challenge. They headed right back to work the next day.

Hogan said these types of challenges hosted by The YPG Fitness Program and the YPG Fitness Center add to employee morale.

"We love it. It's really made the workplace environment better and everyone is healthier and happier. So, it's huge that we get to go and break

the day up and go workout."

Ingram and Hogan are gaining a reputation for setting the bar high. They recently both logged in over 1 million steps in the recent YPG step-challenge back in April and May.

Some might ask, what's the next challenge? YPG Col. John Nelson, motivated and inspired with the men's determination, approached Hogan about competing in a triathlon together in September.

YPG Step-challenge winners

Top 3 Teams

(average steps per member)

1st Place:

Holy Walkamolies –875,427

2nd Place:

Will Run for Cookies –758,925

3rd Place:

The Christopher Walkins –534,668

Top 3 Male Steppers

1st Place:

Ryan Ingham – 1,549,031

2nd Place:

Ronald Matthews – 1,509,887

3rd Place:

Harley Hogan – 1,441,820

Top 3 Female Steppers

1st Place:


Emma Almendarez – 1,033,965

2nd Place:

Sarah Hogan – 848,845


3rd Place:

Ashley Locketto – 830,639




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New documentary reflects on YPG's importance to Army history

By Elisa Reitman

Turning 250 years old, the Army is filled with rich stories fueled by the countless active duty Soldiers and retirees who continue to create history.

U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) is no different with its vast historical background dating back to the 1940s.

As a way to commemorate YPG's involvement in Army history, there was a special screening of the short film documentary 'Tested by Fire: The Yuma Proving Ground story' the week of the Army's 250th birthday.

The screening took place in the atrium of YPG's Bracamonte Range Operations Center at lunchtime on June 9. The atrium was decorated with chairs, cups of complimentary popcorn, and a poster board recognizing Soldiers for their service with QR codes linking to their stories created by Public Affairs Specialist Ana Henderson.

Before the screening, opening remarks were given by YPG Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Millare, thanking YPG's Plans Division who planned the event and the YPG Public Affairs Office for creating



U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Millare speaks at the debut of a YPG history video created by the post's public affairs office on June 9, 2025. The video originated from an idea from post commander Col. John Nelson, who wanted to show YPG's significance to the Army during the service's 250th birthday week. (Photo by Elisa Reitman)

the video itself. The two behind the documentary are YPG's Public Affairs Officer Mark Schauer and Visual Information Manager Eugene Garcia.

"Much of America in world history was influenced by what the Army has done here in Yuma," said Col. John Nelson, YPG commander, told the audience in a video

message. "I hope you appreciate this incredibly proud history that you're a part of and that you know how grateful the Army is for your efforts."

Afterwards a narration by Schauer begins detailing the history of YPG's involvement in the Army in World War II and the subsequent wars America has faced and how YPG

has played a critical role in weapon testing to succeed aiding Soldiers with high quality defense.

"The video is a testament to what we do at YPG," Millare. "YPG does everything professionally and so does the team."

The documentary was the idea of Nelson, who wanted to dedicate a video for the Army's 250th birthday on June 14 showcasing the significant history of YPG.

"So, I wrote the script," said Schauer. "I narrated it, but the visual brilliance was entirely Gene Garcia's doing."

The information compiled within the documentary came from Schauer's extensive knowledge of YPG's history, stemming from many sources such as the many Soldiers he has met giving first-hand accounts of their time at YPG, and his time being there.

"I have worked here for a little over 17 years in this office. So, just being exposed to it over that length of time I picked it up."

Additionally, within the documentary there were a plethora of visuals. Showcasing tanks, missiles, and other weaponry all tested at YPG, utilizing "in house" footage from the Army's archives.

"The video had history in it from us," said Garcia. "It's like I was working with past employees to build this video. I was working with the people back then to kind of show what YPG does to this day."

Anyone who would like to watch the documentary in person can come to YPG's ceremony for the Army's birthday being held at the Colorado River State Historic Park, located at 201 N. 4th Avenue in Yuma, on June 14. Alternatively the documentary is publicly available on YPG's YouTube channel and the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (DVIDS) for those unable to attend.

YPG visits students during summer camp

Members of the U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) workforce visited Ronald Reagan Elementary School to teach students about YPG's mission of testing items for the Warfighter on June 11. YPG's S1 Teresa Elizalde, Technology and Investments Directorate Sean Franklin, and from the Combat Systems Branch, Marco Nixen spoke with about 90 students attending the summer space themed camp. (Photo by Ana Henderson)



YPG and AWC: meeting educational needs



Arizona Western College (AWC) President Dr. Daniel Corr along with deans, directors and professors visited U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) to discuss how AWC can meet YPG's educational needs. Technical Director Ross Gwynn, Chief of Staff Omar Silva and Garrison General Manager Ken Musselwhite provided a command overview. The group then discussed which trades programs would benefit YPG's future and current workforce. The group then visited a few trade shops and heard from trade workers. (Photos by Ana Henderson)



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BIRTHDAY

FROM PAGE 1

say I was delighted,” said YPG Commander Col. John Nelson, who expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share YPG’s story with the broader Yuma community.

Visitors to YPG’s display got up close and personal with the gear used and tested by the elite Soldiers of the Airborne Test Force, saw equipment tested at YPG like the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle and Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle, as well as a Bradley Fighting Vehicle

and M119 howitzer. YPG’s weapon operators also brought out mortars to show the visitors and served as subject matter experts on YPG’s artillery testing mission throughout the event.

In addition to serving as oldest Soldier present to cut the traditional Army cake, Nelson provided keynote remarks at the event before swearing in a group of newly enlisted Army recruits in front of a large crowd of attendees.

“Celebrating the 250th anniversary at the Colorado River State Historic Park is another opportunity to remind the folks in Yuma that the

Army has been here a long time and will be here for the next 100 years,” said YPG Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Millare. “Telling the story to make sure the community knows who we are is very important to us.”

The opening ceremony also featured Yuma Mayor Douglas Nicholls reading a City of Yuma Proclamation honoring the Army’s semiquincentennial. The formal parts of the event were emceed by former YPG Commander Col. (ret) Rob Filbey, who commanded the post from 1996 to 2000. In addition to multiple other participants with booths, games for children, and

presentations, there were free hot dogs and sodas for eventgoers.

Yuma County Sheriff Leon Wilmot, Yuma County Supervisor Darren Simmons, and Cocopah Economic Development Director Gary Magrino brought several vintage Army vehicles to display.

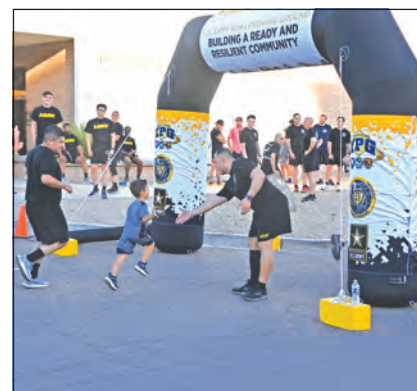
“It goes to show you why Yuma was recently awarded the title of Great American Defense Community,” said Nelson. “There is a long history of support for both Yuma Proving Ground and MCAS-Yuma.”

(Photos by Mark Schauer, Ana Henderson and Elisa Reitman)





250th celebration on post



To commemorate the U.S. Army's 250th birthday YPG hosted a series of events, challenges, a video screening and lunch specials. On June 12, Soldiers and civilians laced up their running shoes for a 2.50 fun run. Following the run the YPG community gathered inside the Fitness Center for a ceremony which included the National Anthem rendered by Carlos Garcia, and the ceremonial cake cutting of the Army Birthday cake by the youngest and oldest Soldier, Pfc. Adowa Agyemang and Lt. Col. Steven Gariepy.



On June 11, the Cactus Café hosted a BBQ with cake with a performance by the Child Development Center toddlers singing the Army song. (Photos by Mark Schauer and Elisa Reitman)

Unbroken legacy: Half-track replica at Yuma Proving Ground honors the 'Greatest Generation'

By Mark Schauer

On the 81st anniversary of D-Day, a small group of Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) personnel honored the Soldiers whose efforts at what is now U.S. Army YPG played a vital role in the Allied victory.

Training Exercise Management Office (TEMO) Chief Luis Arroyo led the dedication of a replica World War II era M3 half-track vehicle

on display outside YPG's Forward Operating Base (FOB) Laguna the morning of June 6.

Dubbed 'The Spirit of Camp Laguna,' retired YPG Heritage Center curator Bill Heidner read the modest plaque at the culmination of the simple team-building ceremony. In addition to TEMO employees Kevin Hunt and David Dupuis, Randy Ehrlich, Tim Warnock, Robert Bauer and Austin Avery were in attendance. Falling on a Friday, the event took place outside of regular duty hours: at YPG, personnel have typically worked four 10-hour days per week since the early 1990s.

Constructed by YPG's threat target and carpentry shops, the replica armored personnel character utilizes disused parts from various military vehicles, from a MIM-23 Hawk missile carrier to an M35 2 1/2 ton truck. Like the rest of the vehicle,



LEFT: Retired Yuma Proving Ground Heritage Center curator Bill Heidner (left) unveils a modest plaque for the "Spirit of Camp Laguna" as Training Exercise Management Office personnel Kevin Hunt (center) and Luis Arroyo (right) look on. RIGHT: U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground Training Exercise Management Office Chief Luis Arroyo (left) and retired Yuma Proving Ground Heritage Center curator Bill Heidner (right) examine the "Spirit of Camp Laguna" replica World War II era M3 half-track vehicle now on display outside YPG's Forward Operating Base (FOB) Laguna. (Photos by Mark Schauer)



massive Desert Maneuver Area that spanned Arizona, California, and Nevada. They trained in the blazing hot desert to prepare for combat in North Africa, but the Allies defeated the Nazis there before their training was finished. Nonetheless, it served them well in their deployment to Europe: more than one veteran of Desert Maneuver Area training

the replica half-track's bumper sports period-correct stenciling identifying it as belonging to the 13th Infantry Regiment of the 8th Infantry Division.

"TEMO borrows the lineage of the 8th Infantry Division because they happened to be the first to train at Camp Laguna as a division element," explains Arroyo. "The 13th Infantry Regiment is still an active unit, but is now a basic training unit."

Arroyo's original concept of the display called for a genuine World War II-era M3, and arrangements had been made for a long-term loan of one from Anniston Army Depot prior to YPG's Heritage Center museum being closed by the Center for Military History in 2023.

"We wanted to tie the lineage and heritage of Camp Laguna to FOB Laguna," said Arroyo.

YPG's primary mission is testing

equipment for troops, but in recent years well over 100 units have utilized the installation for training purposes, oftentimes including multi-week stays in the proving ground's FOB Laguna.

To ensure continuity in its vital mission of testing equipment for warfighters before their lives depend on it, the proving ground's civilian workforce of engineers, data collectors and others has usually exceeded the number of Soldiers throughout its more than 80-year history. Army testing in the desert near modern YPG occurred during World War II, too, but back then training Soldiers was the prime activity-- and what Soldiers they were.

Seven of the 20 divisions that trained in the Desert Southwest were in the first wave that assaulted the beaches at Normandy in June 1944, including elements of the 8th and 79th Infantry Divisions that trained at Camp Laguna. They helped repel Hitler's massive, but unsuccessful, last gasp offensive in the Ardennes Forest that bitterly cold winter. As German resistance melted away with the spring thaw, they liberated Nazi death camps inside Germany.

The Soldiers who engaged in these heroics were made, not born. The destinies of 20 divisions, more than 200,000 men, were forged in the

said that the intense hardships of combat in Belgium's raw winter were less grueling than a summer in southwestern Arizona subsisting on two quarts of water per day.

Their efforts were greatly aided by the M2 Treadway Bridge, the Army's first modern tactical pontoon bridge, which had been rapidly tested at Yuma Test Branch prior to the invasion of Normandy. YTB engineers also developed the cantilevered delivery system for the more versatile and robust Bailey Bridge, which enabled Soldiers to construct a bridge on the friendly side of a gap and push it across before engaging the enemy. By the end of the war, Allied combat engineers had erected thousands of these temporary bridges as retreating Axis forces destroyed permanent bridges behind them.

YPG is the last active Army installation in the Desert Maneuver Area, and within its boundaries lies what once was Camp Laguna. Today, all that is left on the desert floor are concrete pads, rock-lined pathways that were once flanked by hundreds of tents, the occasional unit insignia rendered in rocks, and scattered detritus of camp life: badly rusted tin ration cans and cups, and the occasional glass Coke bottle. The camp's legacy lives on in a free Europe, not in architectural remains.

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Army childcare employees now receive 100% discount on childcare

By Christopher Reitman

Beginning June 1, 2025, Child and Youth Services (CYS) employees across the Army will receive a major childcare benefit, aimed at supporting workforce retention and making childcare more affordable for military families.

As part of the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act Section 633, this policy provides 100% childcare coverage for the first child of CYs employees and a 25% discount for additional children enrolled in Army childcare programs.

Supporting military families & strengthening childcare staffing

Staffing childcare programs at a remote post like U.S. Army Garrison Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) comes with real challenges. Finding and keeping qualified professionals isn't always easy, and we've seen how turnover affects families who rely on dependable care.

Offering full childcare coverage for employees' first child—and discounts for additional children—makes YPG a more attractive place to work, easing financial strain and strengthening workforce stability. For military families here, that means greater reliability and consistency in childcare services.

At YPG, supporting military families starts with ensuring children have the care they need. For parents, childcare isn't just about convenience, it's about stability, security, and developmental support. The impact of this initiative extends beyond affordability, it helps parents focus on their responsibilities knowing their children are in a safe, nurturing environment.

How the Discount Works

- Employees in CYs will see major childcare benefits, starting with full coverage for their first child.
- Additional children receive a 25% discount on standard

tuition.

• The discount applies to all CYs employees, including Family Child Care providers whose children are enrolled in Child Development Centers or School Age Centers.

As of June 1, childcare staff will begin updating billing systems to apply the new rates, making sure fee reductions go into effect as planned. These manual adjustments are designed to ensure accuracy so that families see the benefits right away. As the Army continues to review the program's impact, feedback from our employees and military families will help shape future policies, ensuring that our services remain effective and responsive to community needs.

For more info on CYs employment opportunities or how the Civilian Employment Assignment Tool program supports military spouses, visit www.armymwr.com/programs-and-services/cys.

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Kickoff summer pool party at the pool



The Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) community kicked off the summer with a fun pool party at the Kahuna Lagoon on May 30. The event hosted by the YPG Fitness Center and sponsored by Fly Yuma and IHG Army Hotels brought out over 80 community members who enjoyed, music, food, contests and giveaways. (Photos by Dani Compton)

YPG Halo Chapel welcomes new religious service officer

By Ana Henderson

The Halo Chapel at U.S. Army Garrison Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) welcomes Staff Sgt. Noe Barrera the new religious service officer.

Barrera who has served for 10 years grew in Zapata, Texas and said he joined the Army because it's a "family tradition." His parents served in the Army for 20 years, and he enjoys the "structure" of Army life.

Between his Army career and growing up as an Army Brat, a nickname that's given to kids of Soldiers, Barrera has lived all over the U.S. and in South Korea.

In his role as the noncommissioned officer in charge at the chapel, he's responsible for the coordination of resiliency events and services, bringing the community



The Halo Chapel and U.S. Army Garrison Yuma Proving Ground welcomes Staff Sgt. Noe Barrera the new religious service officer. (Photo by Ana Henderson)

together.

"When the recruiter told me I get to help Soldiers that was the biggest thing that helped me choose this MOS [military occupational specialty]."

Barrera said his work is "very fulfilling." He values the opportunities within his position allowing him to connect with and help his fellow Soldiers.

"Talking to Soldiers, helping Soldiers, coordinating help for Soldiers. Suicide intervention. I have done plenty of those in my career. Understanding what Soldiers are going through because I more than likely have been through it myself."

In his free time, his wife and three young kids keep him busy. Since arriving in April, they are getting acquainted with the post and the "sense of community" YPG offers.

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