

# THE OUTPOST

U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground, Yuma, Arizona 85365

Volume 41 No. 35 October 29, 2012

Published for the employees and families of Yuma Proving Ground, Yuma Test Center, U.S. Army Garrison — Yuma, Cold Regions Test Center and Tropic Regions Test Center

## Environmental chamber back in business after major upgrades

By Mark Schauer

Extreme temperatures and high humidity.

Both are available in abundance at Yuma Proving Ground's three test centers, but also inside carefully controlled conditioning chambers at Yuma Test Center.

Capable of altering the indoor climate to temperatures ranging from an Arctic-simulating -60 degrees Fahrenheit to a blazing 160 degrees Fahrenheit, and also controlling relative humidity, climactic chambers can't perfectly replicate real-world conditions, but are, nonetheless, vital components in testing virtually every piece of equipment Soldiers rely on, from artillery and vehicles to the rounds they fire and the gear they wear.

After a hiatus of several years, the Large Multipurpose Environmental Chamber (LMPEC) at YPG has reopened for testing with over \$3 million in cutting



Though the conditioning chamber is primarily used for vehicles, it can accommodate a wide variety of equipment, from palletized loads to unmanned aircraft. "This facility can be applicable to the test mission of all divisions at YPG," said Todd Hudson, branch chief with the Metrology and Simulation Division (pictured).

PHOTOS BY MARK SHAUER

edge upgrades. Several dozen YPG personnel who played a role in the facility's transformation were on hand for a dedication ceremony in late October.

"This is a fine example of meeting a test customer requirement and figuring out

ways to leverage assets we already have to end up with a very nice facility," said YPG commander Col. Reed Young at the ceremony. "It speaks volumes about the ingenuity and dedication YPG folks show."

Though YPG was still able

to accommodate hot and cold chamber testing during the LMPEC's refurbishment, the heavy workload at the Army's busiest test center meant scheduling was a consistent challenge.

"It is great that this is up and running again," said

Steve Flores, acting chief of YPG's Munitions and Weapons Division. "This frees up our other chamber so vehicle testing can be done here and programs requiring firing can be conducted at the other chamber."

While the LMPEC is unable to accommodate the firing of artillery pieces and mortars, testers can fire small arms and weapons up to 40 mm from an adjustable firing port inside the conditioning chamber. The chamber is primarily used for vehicles, but testers are quick to add that it can accommodate climatic testing of a wide variety of equipment, from palletized loads to unmanned aircraft.

"This facility can be applicable to the test mission of all divisions at YPG," said Todd Hudson, branch chief with the Metrology and Simulation Division. "You can conduct environmental testing for anything that will fit inside: It doesn't have

see **CHAMBER** page 2

From Powdered Wigs  
To Camouflage...

Part 2  
Page 6



Viewpoints :  
Your Last Time  
Trick-or-Treating?  
Page 4



Wildlife use  
of  
Mesquite Bosques  
Page 7



# CHAMBER

FROM COVER



Evaluators who want a particularly wet environment can use the LMPEC's new reverse osmosis system to feed water into a steam boiler to produce relative humidity of up to 95 percent. Here, Todd Hudson, branch chief with the Metrology and Simulation Division (right) shows the system's water tanks to YPG commander Col. Reed Young during a tour of the facility that followed its dedication ceremony.

to be a vehicle, it just happens that typically we test vehicles inside it."

One particularly useful feature of the LMPEC for vehicle testing is its chassis dynamometer, a kind of treadmill for vehicles that allows testers to evaluate engine performance by delivering power to its wheels, but keeping it stationary. The chassis dynamometer inside the LMPEC can accommodate even heavy military vehicles like the Stryker or the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle being run at simulated speeds of up to 65 miles per hour.

"This is the only chamber at YPG that has a chassis dynamometer,"

said Hudson. "You can make a cold or hot environment and test engine performance or other vehicle systems in those conditions."

Evaluators who want a particularly wet environment can use the LMPEC's new reverse osmosis system to feed water into a steam boiler to produce relative humidity of up to 95 percent. Though capable of producing toasty temperatures with heaters, the most state-of-the-art aspect of the new LMPEC is its condensers that produce a chill worthy of the Arctic. Rather than use massive conventional compressors, the LMPEC uses cutting edge screw-type condensers to lower



Given special recognition for their efforts in the LMPEC refurbishment project were, left to right, Paul Rouff, Norberto Deleon, Paul Dupree, Wayne Jenkins, and Todd Hudson. The Metrology and Simulation employees were recognized by (fourth from right) YPG Technical Director Julio Dominguez, Yuma Test Center Commander Lt. Col. Chad Harris, YPG Commander Col. Reed Young, and Ground Systems Test Directorate Director Larry Bracamonte.

temperatures in stages.

"The condensers are about a third the size of the previous ones, meaning they are more efficient and easier to control and maintain," said Hudson. "Operationally, the old compressors would take a day or two to bring the chamber down to the lowest temperature. Now we can bring down the temperature in a matter of hours. We can control the environment better and change conditions much more rapidly."

The LMPEC also boasts a variety of upgraded amenities for test customers who want to monitor their item's progress in conditions that are less extreme than those found inside the chamber. The control and test viewing rooms look very similar to those found at newer gun positions across the range, down to the wide-screen test monitors and radio communication boxes.

"The test personnel rooms have been upgraded," said Hudson. "In the past, test officers and other personnel had to huddle around a single laptop."

The chamber itself is contained within a transition environment that buffers test personnel rooms from the extreme temperatures inside, and is

outfitted with items such as cameras, air quality monitors, and ports to vent engine exhaust from vehicles under test. During testing, the neoprene seals around the doors' cracks are vacuum sealed to keep the chamber environment exactly as testers want it.

"If the door doesn't seal properly, it lets in moisture from outside and your cold test becomes an unintentional ice test," said Wayne Jenkins, chief of the Metrology and Simulation Division. "There is a lot of engineering that went into just ensuring that the doors work properly, let alone the chamber as a whole."

The refurbished LMPEC is already scheduled for upcoming tests, and YPG's senior leaders expect the facility to be an important piece of test infrastructure for many years to come.

"This chamber has gone through many different iterations over the years," said Jenkins. "It started out in the early 1980s as a very small human factors-type test chamber for testing cold weather gear and has undergone two dramatic expansions since that time. Its current iteration is a labor of love that is a true engineering feat."



Metrology and Simulation Branch Chief Todd Hudson (second from right) discusses the capabilities of the Large Multipurpose Environmental Chamber with dignitaries after the dedication ceremony on October 22. After a hiatus of several years, the facility has reopened for testing with over \$3 million in cutting edge upgrades.

# Cerebral Palsy doesn't hold back Californian native

## 'I'm where I want to be -- happy, content'

By Yolie Canales

**Editor's Note: Held each October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is a national campaign that raises awareness about disability employment issues and observes the many contributions of America's workers with disabilities.**

NDEAM beginnings go back to 1945, when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October as "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week." However, in 1961, the word "physically" was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with numerous types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to what it is now. Employers, schools, agencies and organizations of all sizes and in all communities are encouraged to participate in NDEAM by putting up posters, implementing a disability education program and more.

Everyone plays an important part in fostering a more inclusive America, one where each and every person is recognized for his or her abilities - every day of every month.

In this Outpost issue, Brian Baker, office support assistant for the Directorate of Public Works, is being highlighted for the contributions, drive, motivation and professionalism he has contributed to the federal government and community.

Baker, who was born with cerebral palsy, which affects the full use of his right hand and leg, hailed to Yuma Proving Ground last month from Joint Base Lewis McCord in Washington, where he worked for the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center as a human resources technician in the Management and Employee Relations Division. Raised in a military family setting, Baker said he was influenced by the military

since his mother served in the Army for 10 years and now works for the government in Korea. However, due to his disability, he knew he could never enlist and be like his mom.

"I decided that since I would not be able to pass the requirements to join the Army, the next best thing was to work for the Army and contribute all that I can, to fulfill my duties," said Baker.

The 32 year old single achiever says that although the government has many great programs to accommodate the physically disabled, he doesn't ask for much. He says that there is nothing that he cannot do pertaining to his work.

"I've become a great and efficient typist with one hand. If people saw me typing they would be amazed how well I can do it," he said. "Of course, there are other careers that were exciting for me, but I knew where I belonged and where I would succeed."

Baker said that when he was growing up, his parents never discouraged him from getting involved in sports or other fun things.

"My parents gave me the opportunity to play soccer, which I still play and love, and basketball with other kids," he said. "I was never treated different than any other child on the soccer field or basketball court. I was accepted as one of them. In fact, these were challenges that I knew I could handle and overcome. I encourage other parents who have children with physical disabilities to get them involved and let them become independent. It's good for the mind and for one's esteem."

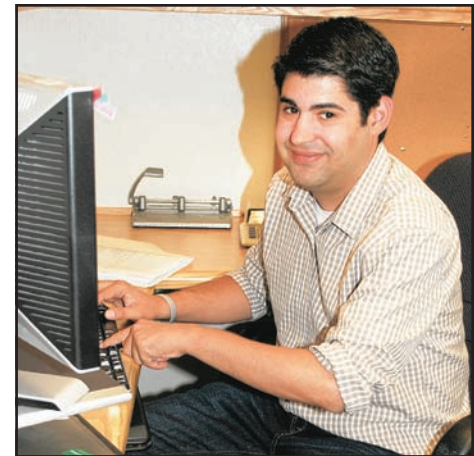
A graduate of Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Ariz., Baker holds a degree in psychology. However, he said, "I did not follow this career because I did not find it challenging and to make good money, one has to pursue either a

master's or a PHD and I was not ready for this. However, working for the Department of Defense, there is always something new to learn. But most rewarding and unique is given the opportunity to work independently and contributing to the support of our troops. I don't want to be treated special or different. I've accepted myself and I hope everyone out there does the same."

Baker said that challenges do not keep him from moving forward.

"I stay fit by going to the gym on a daily basis doing cardio workout and if a game of basketball is going on, I join in," he said. "I find that this keeps my muscles loose and helps them from tightening up, which with my condition can be a big issue. Exercising is second nature to me.

When you have cerebral palsy, one has to go through rigorous occupational and



Brian Baker says the most rewarding experience he has been given the opportunity to work independently in his career.

PHOTO BY YOLIE CANALES

physical therapy all your life, so staying physically fit is a must and I enjoy it."

"My career is the most rewarding aspect of my life," he added. "I am where I want to be. Although growing up I had two dreams, to join the military or become a professional athlete, I accepted I could not do either, but I'm where I want to be, happy and content."

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# October Go-Getters



**Ainsley Gleason**



**Gracie Schultz**

Congratulations to Ainsley Gleason and Gracie Schultz both 1st grade students from Miss Wieckowski's class, for being selected Price Elementary School "Go-Getters" for the month of October.

## Next Outpost deadline is noon NOVEMBER 1ST

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# VIEWPOINTS

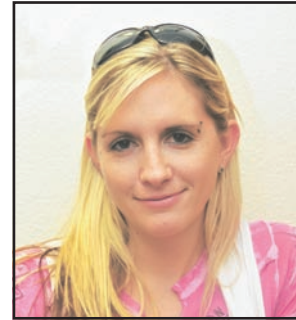
Trick-or-treating is the highlight of Halloween for the kids, but as the years pass by it is difficult to recall every costume we wore when young. Nonetheless, for this Viewpoint we asked members of the YPG workforce, "What did you dress up as the last time you went trick-or-treating as a child?"



**Sgt. Cherica Ibarra**  
Parachute Rigger

I was nine years old, and I was Raggedy Ann and my brother was Raggedy Andy. I was sick, though, and couldn't go trick-or-treating.

**Jacki Dumas**  
Program Analyst



My first and last time as a youngster was when I was 16. My stepmother had me dress up as a witch—she did all of my makeup, applied a fake nose, and everything. Me and my three stepsisters walked around for three hours trick-or-treating.



**Nick Carlson**  
Information Technology Specialist

I was Jack the Ripper. It was here in Yuma, and I was probably about 12 years old. It was a costume from the store, and it reminded me more of Sweeney Todd. My parents wouldn't let me take a real straight razor.

**Bill Heidner**  
Museum Curator



I was a Confederate Soldier. The inspiration was a TV show at the time called The Rebel, about a former Confederate Soldier named Johnny Yuma who was travelling the west after the war and being a good guy, but facing stigmatism for having been a Confederate. I was about 10 years old, in Libertyville, Ill., and the show created a craze for Johnny Yuma among the kids.

**Lindsey Lively**  
Engineering Technician



It's embarrassing now, but I was a McDonald's French fry—one of my friends was a hamburger, and another was a milk shake. It was all part of an outfit we saw at the store of a McDonald's combo meal, so we decided to do it. I rocked the outfit- I didn't go home until my pillowcase was full of candy.

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News may be submitted to:

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

Phone: (928) 328-6143/6189 or DSN 899-6143.

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# YPG folks keep Highway 95 Clean From plastic bottles to charred remains of a burned seat!

By Mark Schauer

They gathered early on a recent Thursday morning, dressed in reflective vests and listened to a safety briefing before heading out to perform their mission. But it wasn't to take place at a gun position. Hoisting large blue trash bags and wearing heavy gloves, about 20 YPG employees volunteered to pick up litter along the stretch of Highway 95 running past the big guns.

"We ran out of vests and gloves before we ran out of interest," said Col. Reed Young, YPG commander, who was among the volunteers. "I'd much rather run out of vests than people interested in volunteering."

Participants quickly filled their trash bags with a wide variety of roadside debris, from scores of cigarette butts and plastic bottles to rubber from tire blowouts and the charred remains of a burned seat.

Sadly, the stretch of Highway 95 that passes through YPG is similar to any other thoroughfare in the state in its ability to attract litter. According to the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), the monthly accumulation along highways in the Phoenix area alone fills over 6,000 trash bags. In addition to being unsightly, roadside debris can endanger the safety of wildlife and passing motorists. Collecting all of this garbage from along nearly

7,000 miles of highway statewide is pricey, and the state relies on volunteer labor through the Adopt a Highway program to accomplish a portion of it. Adopting a highway isn't as simple as collecting litter, though. Coordinators are required by ADOT to take six hours of training, in addition to acquiring a license and permit.

"I always thought this was a neat program," said Young. "It would be great if people were more conscientious about not littering, but, notwithstanding that, I love the idea of the program. YPG doesn't own Highway 95, but just as we're good stewards of the environment, cultural heritage, and archaeological



Dressed in reflective vests and gloves, Donnette Brown from the Environmental Directorate waits for a new trash bag to continue the cleanup along Highway 95 during the Arizona Department of Transportation Adopt a Highway cleanup day.

PHOTOS BY YOLIE CANALES

see **CLEAN** page 10

## From powdered wigs to camouflage: The every-changing style of the Army

This is part two series written by Chris Miller, a Purple Heart recipient, who served two tours in Iraq. He is currently a policy advocate at Veterans for Common Sense, and a fellow with the Truman National Security Project.

In the following years, almost every western military ditched the traditional bright colors and adopted uniform colors that aided concealment in shades of khaki, brown, or grey. At the outbreak of World War I, only the French Army maintained colorful uniforms of blue coats and red trousers.

World War I -- with its grinding trench warfare and development of machine guns, tanks, and warplanes -- had a powerful role to play in this change. For the first time, military uniforms were not meant to be seen, and this shift became even more pronounced a generation later. When

most Americans think of G.I. Joe serving in World War II, they picture the M-1943 olive drab uniform, which was designed with the cold, wet, and verdant climates of Europe in mind.

Uniforms made of tightly-woven cotton "Byrd cloth" were designed for service in the tropics to stop mosquito, flea, and leach bites and allowed for better cooling than wool. However, these uniforms took longer to make and field and there was an acute shortage of them. Some old Soldiers found it hard to shed military formality completely in favor of utility. General George S. Patton famously insisted that officers under his command still wear their ties into combat.

The U.S. Army field uniform remained largely unchanged with only a few minor alterations until the 1980s. When we think of the Korean War, we often picture men freezing in olive drab fatigues and coats huddled

around fires wearing their pile caps. Grunts wore generally the same green uniform made of cotton in the jungles of Vietnam. The famous "tigerstripe" camouflage uniform worn in the 1960s by American advisors and special operations units in Vietnam was never officially authorized, though it was effective in the dense jungle. It also mimicked the uniforms worn by South Vietnamese soldiers and allowed U.S. troops to blend in with their counterparts as well as the terrain.

Since that time, American camouflage has gone through a number of revisions - from the interlocking pattern called "ERDL," introduced in 1968, to the new pixelated pattern introduced in 2005.

But is camouflage still relevant? A large share of the fighting in Iraq took place in urban terrain. All U.S. movements issued from large fortified camps and bases that were often

watched from the outset by enemy observers. A force that rides around in armored Humvees and Abrams tanks accompanied by attack helicopters isn't exactly hiding. In Afghanistan where the fighting is in much more rural, rocky, and remote terrain, the battle consists of trying to draw the enemy out of hiding among the local populace to be engaged. Pulling the enemy out of hiding is the only way to know they're



see **STYLE** page 10

# Wildlife use of Mesquite Bosques

**By Fenner Yarborough, Arizona Game and Fish Department**

As I approach a mesquite bosque along Poleline Road, on Yuma Proving Ground's ranges, I'm curious to see what animals decided to pay us a visit this month. I can already see plenty of evidence of use in the form of trails, tracks, and scat. Upon inspection of the camera, I see that there are 423 images on the memory card. I remove the memory card, replace it with a new one, and head to the next bosque. I'm excited to get back to the office and look through the images and see what the pictures will reveal.

In 2009, the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD), in conjunction with Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) Conservation Program, initiated a camera-trapping study of 16 mesquite bosques on the YPG Cibola Range and recently placed 15 additional digital trail cameras in bosques on the Kofa range. The purpose of this research project is to gain a better understanding of mesquite bosques and their value to wildlife.

We placed our cameras close to animal trails or openings, under overhanging vegetation where possible, and facing north to reduce temperature and glare



A camera mounted on a post takes some pretty accurate shots of the typical wildlife who roam these areas.

from the sun. Cameras are triggered by a motion sensor and have an infrared flash for nighttime operation. We programmed each camera to take a single still photo at high resolution on a 1-minute delay. Each image is stamped with the current temperature, moon phase, date, time, and camera identification number. Digital images are downloaded monthly, provided to YPG for review and clearance, and then processed to identify wildlife occurrence.

Mesquite bosques are unique woodlands that occur in the Sonoran Desert and other parts of the arid Southwest. Mesquite bosques are characterized by a variety of shrubs, grasses and trees which create opportunities for nesting, hunting, hiding, and foraging by a wide array of wildlife species. In Arizona, these isolated patches are nested within Sonoran desert scrub vegetation, typically broad valleys dominated by creosote bush. Mesquite bosques on YPG are unique because they occur as isolated patches of varying size and configuration. There has been interest by resource managers to create and monitor wildlife use of artificial bosques created by modifications associated with road construction or excavation of fill material. These artificial bosques have not previously been studied in regards to wildlife use.

One of the most exciting aspects of this study is reviewing the images. We have documented 28,518 events (defined as a photo containing one or more identified animals) that included 24 species of birds and mammals. Preliminary analyses suggest that bosque size is an important predictor of wildlife use, with larger bosques used more frequently and by more species. The smaller, artificial bosques on the Kofa Range also appear to receive significant wildlife use, though by fewer species and in lesser numbers than observed in larger, natural bosques

on the Cibola Range. To date, AZGFD has recorded 404 wildlife observations on the Kofa Range. Seventy species were identified, of which black-tailed jackrabbits, mule deer, and coyote occurred most frequently. Mule deer events were highest in April, decreased dramatically in May, and then increased monthly to another peak in October before dropping November-December.

Events involving mule deer fawns were first recorded in September, peaked in October, then decreased in November and December. Mammalian predator events were correlated with those of mule deer, May-December.

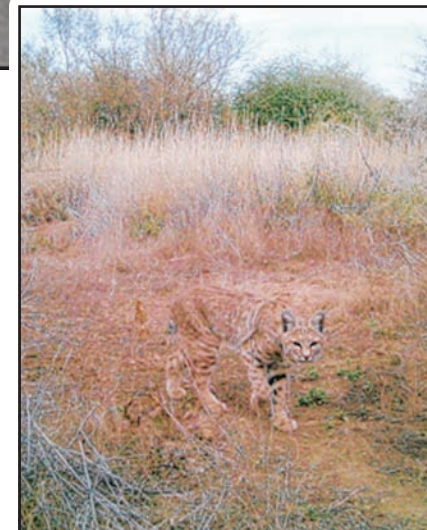
This study will help AZGFD and YPG understand how factors affect establishment of bosques on YPG and could help identify candidate sites for habitat mitigation or enhancement. As we continue with our study, we will continue to learn even more about the importance of mesquite bosques and the wildlife that use them.

For more information regarding this article and contents, contact: Fenner Yarborough, Arizona Game and Fish Department, 5000 W. Carefree Highway, Phoenix, AZ 85086; Email: [ryarborough@azgfd.gov](mailto:ryarborough@azgfd.gov)



A mule deer is caught on camera at Kofa Firing Range.

On a dark night, this mountain lion was seen near the Kofa Firing Range.



Blending into the bosque, this bobcat was caught on camera near Cibola Lake Road in the middle of the day. LOANED PHOTOS



A view of mesquite bosque off of Poleline Road.

# Mesquite II at Mesa Del Sol



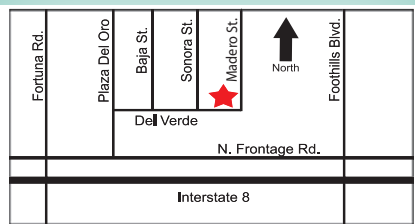
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YPG joins Yuma community event: 'Getting Arizona Involved in Neighborhoods'

Kids of all ages enjoyed getting up close and personal with the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) displayed by Yuma Proving Ground at the 10th annual Getting Arizona Involved in Neighborhoods (GAIN) event at the Target parking lot in Yuma. On hand to answer questions about the vehicle, YPG's mission, and Army life was the Airborne Test Force's Sgt. Cherica Ibarra. "The kids had a lot of good questions," said Ibarra. "I think some of them are future Soldiers."

PHOTO BY MARK SCHAUER

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## CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

# Stress relief

By Chaplain Loren (Maj.) Hutsell

I once read the following illustration about stress: A lecturer, when explaining stress to an audience raised a glass of water and asked, "How heavy is this glass of water?" Answers called out ranged from 20g to 55g. The lecturer replied, "The absolute weight doesn't matter. It depends on how long you try to hold it. If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my arm. If I hold it for a day you'll have to call an ambulance." He continued, "And that is the way it is with stress management. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the

burden becomes increasingly heavy, we won't be able to carry on. As with the glass of water, you have to put it down and rest a while before holding it again. Once we are refreshed we can carry on with the burden."

Imagine for a moment that you are holding a glass that is filled with the burdens of your life that are causing you stress and anxiety. How heavy does that glass feel? Perhaps it is time to set it down and rest for a while. In dealing with stress it is helpful to think of life as a long road trip. Part of traveling long distances is pausing at rest stops and gas stations to take breaks. The same is true of our lives. It is important to take time to rest and unwind at some

point every day.

As I deal with the burdens and stress of my life, I have found it helpful to pray and ask God for help. In fact, God asks us to let him help us carry the burdens of life. He tells us in Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Sometimes, we might carry around stress and other related factors such as guilt, fear, anger, and insecurity for much of our lives. But I encourage you, don't travel too long without regular stops at a "prayer rest area" where you can pray and give your worries a rest.

Maj. Chaplain Loren Hutsell



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treasures, picking things up along the highway and making it look good is a noble goal.”

The days’ other participants echoed a similar sense of mission and purpose.

“I’ve been volunteering on things like this for over 20 years,” said Marla Lewis, environmental protection specialist for the Environmental Sciences Division. “I volunteered because everybody needs to help out and be responsible for the environment.”

**Christy Bowman (left) acting chief for Emergency Services Directorate and Sissy Pinto, chief of the Plans, Integration Analysis Office, show the large bag they filled with litter they picked up along the highway. “I really enjoyed volunteering in this cleanup project and I’m ready for next year,” said Pinto.**

## VLTP update

Yuma Proving Ground has members of its workforce who are in need of leave donation assistance. Leave donations as small as one hour are appreciated. We can only accept donations from Appropriated Fund civil service employees.

The Voluntary Leave Transfer Program (VLTP) is a way to donate annual leave to co-workers who are experiencing a medical emergency (their own or a family member’s emergency) and do not have enough leave to cover their absences. These employees have used or will use all sick and annual leave before being eligible to receive donations.

**YPG currently has several employees on the VLTP recipient list:**

- TerRee Castello, Garrison, left ankle surgery.
- Audra Lemme, Mission RM, infant son is suffering health complications.
- Alysha Miller, Mission Plans & Ops, maternity.
- MJ Nance, YTC, care of elderly mother-in-law due to injury and illness resulting in death.

- Carlos Padilla, YTC, environmental allergy and bilateral lung densities.

- Gabriela Rios (Ochoa), Mission, maternity leave.

- James Robinson, YTC, cancer surgery with follow-up radiation and chemotherapy.

- Nathan Smith, NEC, family member medical emergency.

Any donation will be appreciated by the recipient. You can donate as little as one hour of annual leave or as much as one half of what you accrue in a leave year, although you must be able to use “use or lose” annual leave before the end of the leave year.

If you are interested in donating annual leave to your co-worker, complete Optional Form 630-A and forward it to the CPAC. We’ll see the donation gets to the appropriate recipient. Please note, CPAC can only accept donations that indicate to whom the hours are to be given - please indicate who should be given your hours. You can split the donations, as long as donations are in full-hour increments.

## STYLE

FROM PAGE 6

there. They usually know where our troops are well before we know where they are. The Army isn’t sneaking up on anyone anymore. Essentially, U.S. troops want to be attacked by their clandestine enemies so they can engage and destroy them.

The Army of today is not a nimble beast that moves stealthily; it is more like a rhinoceros that is a force to be reckoned with. During my first tour in Iraq in 2003, we wore less personal armor and I was able to, on a few occasions, sprint after bad guys down the streets of Baghdad. By my second trip to Baghdad in 2005, wearing virtually my own body weight in gear made this unlikely. The Army had to change and “turtle up” to protect troops and convoys from ambushes and IEDs on supply routes. When fighting like this, camouflage isn’t as important.

It can be argued that the U.S. Army today is fighting in a position more similar to those of the armies of the 18th and 19th centuries. Almost everything we’re doing happens in plain sight. We are in some ways like the British Redcoats of old; we fight in plain sight while our enemies hide amongst the locals and choose softer targets to attack. Ironically, military commanders of earlier centuries used to think camouflage itself was cowardly. Even the New York Times as late as 1917 called new idea of military camouflage “hocus pocus.” It is no wonder some make comparisons between America today and the empire of Great Britain then.

If anything, a new form of camouflage is emerging. Special operations forces, especially Green Berets, often operate by learning the local language and training indigenous populations to fight for U.S. interests. They operated like this effectively among the Montagnard people in Vietnam, the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, and the Kurds of northern Iraq, among others. To do this, they often shed their Army uniforms in

favor of native dress and mannerisms, grow beards, carry local weaponry, and even take to horseback to gain the support and trust of local populations. Some regular Army units partially followed their lead by encouraging soldiers to grow moustaches and let their hair grow a little longer than usual among Middle Eastern cultures that view facial hair as a sign of masculinity.

These special operations units are among the most effective and successful in counterinsurgency operations. What we discovered in Iraq and Afghanistan is that wielding an AK-47, growing a beard, and learning to grin and bear “man kisses” and male hand holding may be better camouflage than any uniform. In doing so, they attract the respect and trust of peoples who have a natural mistrust of western outsiders, especially Americans.

Camouflage does remain important in many military scenarios. It is essential to downed pilots and special operators making ground infiltrations. It will always remain important to scouts and snipers in the field, or to soldiers who are separated from support when an operation begins to go bad and have to pull back into the shadows. These are scenarios in which concealment remains and will likely always be very important.

What’s indisputable is that U.S. Army soldiers today are the best equipped and outfitted in the entire world’s history. Picture General Washington’s Minutemen, shuffling around on watch in the snow of the frigid winter at Valley Forge, shouldering their own hunting muskets, blowing into frozen hands, clad in thin linen shirts, old leather breeches, and worn out shoes. The aristocratic English generals and Lords of the Admiralty didn’t take these upstart colonial farmers and merchants seriously.

The American fighting man has certainly come a long way from those hard days at Valley Forge. Pixels or no pixels, General Washington would have approved.

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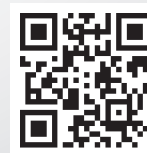
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