General Views Weapon System Testing at Yuma Proving Ground

By Chuck Wullenjohn, U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground

YUMA PROVING GROUND, Ariz. -- Documents, briefings and videos are useful, but there is no substitute for viewing conditions on the ground, up close and personal. Lt. Gen. David Huntoon, director of the Army staff, got that invaluable opportunity yesterday when he spent the day at U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground in southwest Arizona.

Nearly every weapon system used in ground warfare is tested at the 1,300 square mile proving ground, from artillery systems and armored vehicles to unmanned aircraft and technologies used to defeat roadside bombs. Many American lives have been saved and injuries prevented through testing conducted here.

Lt. Gen. David Huntoon, director of the Army Staff, discusses Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle testing with Brendan King, test officer, at U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground in southwest Arizona, Jan. 25, 2010 (Army Photo)

"I came out to get a first-hand sense of the tremendous things taking place at Yuma Proving Ground," said Huntoon, who maintains oversight over all Army test and evaluation assets. "This is a national treasure for the United States military."

On a recent day, Apache helicopters buzzed over rugged desert landscape where Native Americans of the Apache tribe once roamed, artillery pieces fired at targets 40 miles away, armored vehicles roared along road courses, dozens of parachutists dropped from the air, and a new technique for clearing buried land mines was tested -- all at the same time.

In a typical year, 500,000 artillery, mortar and missile rounds are fired, 36,000 parachute drops take place, 200,000 grueling road miles are driven on military vehicles, and over 4000 air sorties are flown from each of six airfields at the proving ground.

Huntoon traveled to Yuma from his office in the Pentagon on Sunday, arriving in time to meet more than one dozen Yuma community leaders over dinner. He shared insights on the future of the proving ground, a major local employer and the center of high technology within Yuma County.

“We are probably going to be living in an era of persistent conflict,” he said. “Places like Yuma Proving Ground will always have a primary importance in testing new weapon systems and munitions."

Huntoon’s visit included witnessing Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle testing and discussing the evaluation of advanced parachute systems. In addition, he viewed the evaluation of technologies used to defeat improvised explosive devices at a simulated overseas village, one of several constructed at the proving ground.

Yuma Proving Ground features the longest overland artillery range in the nation, the most highly instrumented helicopter armament test range in the Department of Defense, over 200 miles of improved road courses for

testing tracked and wheeled military vehicles, over 600 miles of fiber-optic cable linking test locations, the most modern mine and demolitions test facility in the western hemisphere, and extensive, realistic facilities for testing systems used to defeat roadside bombs.

The proving ground's sparkling clean air, low humidity, scant rainfall of about three inches per year, and annual average of 350 sunny days contribute to almost perfect testing and training conditions. In addition, urban encroachment and noise concerns are non-existent problems unlike many other military installations.

Source: http://www.army.mil/-news/2010/01/26/33516-general-views-weapon-system-testing-at-yuma-proving-ground/?ref=news-science-title0