

THE OUTPOST

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

Volume 40 No. 13 July 8, 2013

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

Testing automotive technology amid desert heat

By Chuck Wullenjohn

General Motors located its hot weather test center at Yuma Proving Ground four years ago, a time which has seen the relationship between the Army and General Motors grow and, more importantly, has resulted in a test facility with a reputation for reliability.

Formally known as the “General Motors Desert Proving Ground,” GM’s permanent workforce numbers about 100 employees, supplemented by engineers who travel to Yuma throughout the year.

The test center’s mission is to perform hot weather and general development testing of

General Motors vehicles in such areas as ride and handling, braking and power trains, and more. The heart of the operation is a huge garage, lab and office complex where vehicles are worked on and test components installed, with several paved tracks and a 23 acre paved vehicle dynamics pad for handling

brake work.

Pretty much everything sold to the public by General Motors goes through testing in Yuma, from trucks and sedans to hybrid vehicles, particularly if a model could be used or sold in a hot weather environment. That includes GM’s vehicles produced in plants overseas.

But it isn’t just hot weather work that’s performed in Yuma.

“When it’s snowy and the roads near our headquarters in Michigan are ice covered, we do a great deal of general purpose testing – usually between December and March,” said Frank West, general manager of the GM Desert Proving Ground.

Army testers from Yuma Proving Ground regularly make use of the General Motors test facility, a key component of the original agreement that brought the company to the proving ground.

“Both sides benefit from the sharing of facilities,” said West.

“The Army uses our dynamics pad to

SEE TESTING/2



(PHOTO BY CHUCK WULLENJOHN)

Students attempt to reduce the environmental impact of a Chevy Malibu as part of GM’s Eco Car Challenge. “This represents the future, for the students are the engineers of tomorrow,” said Frank West, general manager.

Local mountain bikers win Arizona championship

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Small shop keeps YPG moving across ranges and beyond

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Mechanical engineer earns prestigious artillery recognition

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(PHOTO BY CHUCK WULLENJOHN)

Two engineering students participating in a competition that students from over 15 North American universities, work on a vehicle at the General Motors Desert Proving Ground at Yuma Proving Ground.

TESTING

FROM PAGE 1

check braking systems on armored vehicles, and we use YPG's dust course and gravel roads. It's been an excellent partnership, for our cultures are similar."

West says he enjoys managing the facility because of the many challenges it brings. "We're constantly working with new technology, which means we have to keep abreast of new developments and keep everyone trained," he said.

"More than this, though, is that we're in a remote location. We need to have people who can expertly work on any aspect of a vehicle." This is important when performing a test on one part of the vehicle and something else causes a problem, for they must respond and conduct repairs on site.

"We can't wait for someone to travel out from Michigan," West emphasized.

He says GM supports technical education programs in Yuma from the grade school level all the way up to college. This benefits the community as well as GM, for the firm has hired many of these same people.

Recently, 200 student engineers from 15 North American universities gathered at the

GM facility to test ecologically-friendly vehicles re-engineered by the student teams. The three year competition challenges students to reduce the environmental impact of a GM-donated Chevrolet Malibu without compromising performance, safety and consumer acceptability.

"This represents the future," commented West, "these students are the engineers of tomorrow. They learn from us and we learn from them."

Russell McCloud, Yuma County supervisor and longtime manager of a local automotive repair firm, sees beneficial results from the partnership between GM and Arizona Western College in establishing engineering and other technical courses. "We've observed much greater interest among high school students going into engineering, which is great for YPG, GM, the community, and the entire country," he said.

McCloud says automobiles are much more complex than when he began. "Cars have changed dramatically," he said. "There are more electronics and computer power in the average vehicle today than there was in the Apollo spacecraft that traveled to the moon in 1969."

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THE OUTPOST

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News may be submitted to:
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Local mountain bikers win Arizona championship

By Yolie Canales

Outdoor enthusiasts will do almost anything to take advantage of enjoying the gorgeous scenery and weather of our state. Recreational opportunities abound, from water sports and softball, to hiking and mountain bike racing.

Eight individuals from Yuma are avid mountain bike racers, six of them Yuma Proving Ground employees, and they have formed a team called "Team America." In fact, many YPG employees have seen them riding their mountain bikes to and from the proving ground as early as 4:30 in the morning along Highway 95 as the 'YPG 500' makes its way to work as well.

"Team America" consists of five Military Freefall School instructors -- Derk Pack, Woody Hunt, Tanner Morgan, Arron Guidry, and Jim Sessions, Aviation Test Director Burt Evans, and Kyle and Eric Smith of Yuma.

"We used to meet on weekends and during our time off from work to ride our bikes. We first starting doing it for fun, for the camaraderie and, for some of us, it was a way of staying physically fit," said Jim Sessions, instructor at the Military Freefall School.

Sessions said they became members of the Mountain Bike Association of Arizona to compete in numerous competitions held throughout the state from October through May. To belong, members need to be a formal team and perform 20 hours annual trail maintenance.

"As a team, we work on trails near Mitty Lake here in Yuma," he explained. To verify that we completed our 20 hours, a representative from the Bureau of Land Management goes out and confirms the work."

Most recently, Team America participated in the Mountain Bike Racing competition held in Flagstaff. "This was the state championship which consisted of 12 categories with 82 teams competing on a 17 mile course. We competed in the third category, where we took first place."

Like any other team sport, training is a necessity. As mountain bike racers, practice consists of bike riding on weekends and as much as members can do during the week. Since mountain bike racing is a team sport, they generally go out as a team. Team training includes distance riding, time, form of riding, climbing, flat land riding, and more. Much training is done on Telegraph Pass which they go up and down as many as five times.

One main form of distance training for the team are rides to and from YPG which consist of a 34 mile round trip. "It's one of the scariest and dangerous training activities we perform," said Sessions. "To be honest, it's more dangerous than jumping out of airplanes, which I do throughout the week. There has been a time or two that we have been run off the road and, numerous times, been hit with bottles of water. But, we love the sport so we continue on our way."



(LOANED PHOTO)

Members of 'Team America' display their 1st place trophy in one of the competitions categories at the recent mountain bike racing competition in Flagstaff, Ariz.

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A 'legend' leaves Cold Regions Test Center

By Jennifer Lawless

From a young age, Todd Zachgo demonstrated a work ethic, aptitude and drive unmatched by most. In his 15 years at Alaska's Cold Regions Test Center (CRTC), he was recognized as the epitome of a "rugged professional."

Greg Netardus, Test Operations Division Chief, said at his recent retirement ceremony, "Todd has positively impacted this organization. In my seven, plus years as division chief, I cannot recall a single time he was not ready, willing and able to fully support testing. Regardless of what was asked, he always found a way to provide it, and many times, came up with solutions that were far better than the ones we had. There is no doubt in my mind that Todd will be missed."

Richard Reiser, test officer, commented, "It was not uncommon for him to call me early in the



(LOANED PHOTO)

Todd Zachgo (right), mechanic lead, has worked with many people from Yuma Proving Ground who have come to test at CRTC. Zachgo is at the Delta River Trail with Small Unit Support Vehicle in this photo.

morning before the workday began or far after the workday ended to check if everything was ready for the next test day." He was known to go downrange at odd hours of the night, morning or even on weekends to fuel a generator or maintain a piece of equipment.

Among Zachgo's accomplishments, he is best known for his expertise with the M88 recovery vehicle.

Whether from CRTC or a visiting unit training, he recovered many an individual who found themselves unprepared amid the deep snow and rugged terrain Alaska offers.

Jeff Lipscomb, CRTC's technical director, summed up the man in one eloquent sentence: "Todd is the one person I know who leaves me speechless with who he is and what he does."

"In my seven, plus years as division chief, I cannot recall a single time he was not ready, willing and able to fully support testing."

— Greg Netardus, Test Operations Division Chief,

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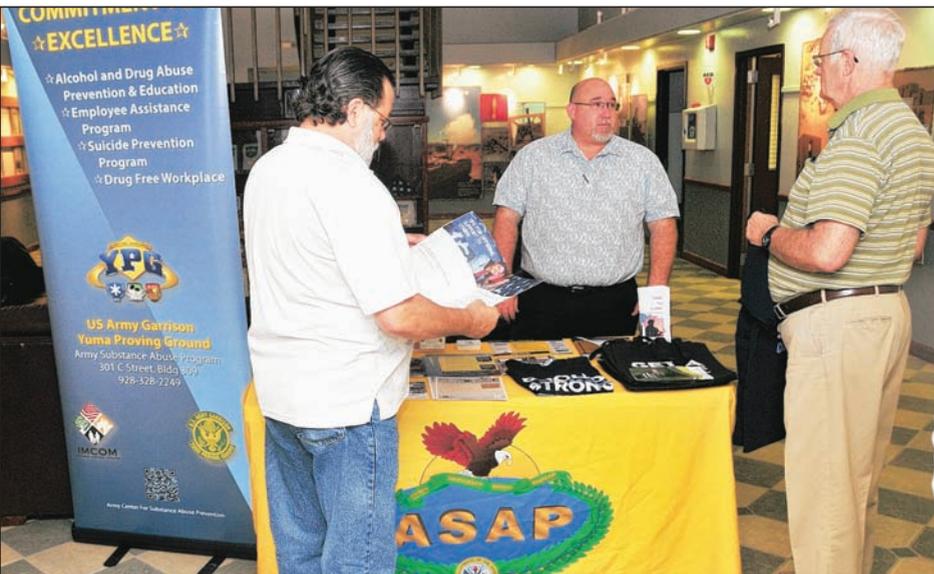
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PTSD display attracts over 120 visitors



Chris Lee (center), Employee Assistance Program Coordinator, explains to visitors that the YPG Employee Assistance Program (EAP), provides service members, veterans, and their families information about Post Traumatic Symptom Disorder (PTSD). In addition to general information about PTSD, pocket cards with links to two new smartphone apps created by T2health.org, the Mood Tracker and PTSD Coach, were distributed. Over 120 tee-shirts were given away and many more people stopped by for information. If you would like to know more about PTSD and other mental health issues, contact the Employee Assistance Program Coordinator, Christopher Lee, at 328-2249 or Christopher.a.lee24.civ@mail.mil.

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Small shop keeps YPG moving

By Mark Schauer

Tanks, fighting vehicles and howitzers.

YPG tests them all in realistic military environments, and testers count on the proving ground's contractor, The Logistics Company (TLC) Equipment Pool, to safely deliver scores of test items to points all across the vast test ranges and beyond.

"It could be anything from moving tanks and equipment for air delivery to moving weapons, setting generators and recovering GSA vehicles," said Edward Pierson, Equipment Pool supervisor. "There is never a dull moment. We try and stay prepared for pretty much anything."

The Equipment Pool operates anywhere testing or training occurs, contending with dusty gravel roads, scrub-strewn desert pavement and deep washes.

"Just driving to a site can be tricky. We go up and down hills on unimproved roads for long distances on a regular basis."

The tools of the Equipment Pool's trade are a variety of tractor trailers and flat beds, and tactical wreckers to transport towed howitzers. Even general maintenance is a challenge, but losing a vehicle even temporarily to a more significant mechanical problem can delay critical tests.

Test schedules change frequently for a variety of reasons, too, and the Equipment Pool needs to be nimble to accomplish the mission, even if it means working evenings or weekends.

"We're easily adaptable," said Pierson. "It's just a matter of calling guys at home."

Night operations in support of testing or training have additional hazards, also.

"It's a whole new ballgame being out here at night. Your visibility is lower and your room for error is a lot less, especially with the animals out."

The Equipment Pool's support of



As part of its ordinary duties, the Equipment Pool crew also moves unusual items, such as this capsule for NASA's Orion program. Busy test schedules change frequently for a variety of reasons at the proving ground, and the Equipment Pool needs to be nimble to accomplish the mission, even if it means working evenings or weekends. "We're easily adaptable," said Pierson.

(PHOTOS BY MARK SCHAUER)



the YPG mission extends beyond the proving ground's boundaries. They have transported vehicles and artillery pieces for display at public events such as the MCAS Air Show and Spirit of Yuma Military Festival, and even to the lawn of the state capitol in Phoenix in support of YPG's Legislative Day events in 2008 and 2011. Recently, the crew was called

upon to move an M47 Patton tank emplaced as a memorial on YPG's Main Administrative Area in 1968. Not only did the old tank lack a motor and drive train, a telephone pole, palm tree, high-curbed sidewalks, and a recreational vehicle park had grown around the monument in the 45 years since it was dedicated. The Equipment Pool crew carefully

wonched the immobile behemoth onto a trailer, saving significant time, expense and disruption that using a heavy specialized crane would have caused.

"We're a small shop compared to some places, but we're an important piece of the pie," said Pierson. "Our guys take pride in what they do and rarely complain. They enjoy it."

Mechanical engineer earns prestigious artillery recognition

By Mark Schauer

The intelligent use of artillery has long been identified as essential to battlefield success. But for all its might, even small anomalies crack can take a large howitzer, out of commission, putting Soldiers in a vulnerable position against our adversaries.

In fielding the best equipment possible, testers are particularly interested in inspecting mortar and artillery equipment for microscopic anomalies. It's not the most dramatic side of testing, but it is critical to the safety and success of American Soldiers, and David Le, mechanical engineer in YPG's Physical Test Facility, is regarded as one of the most experienced professionals in the field of non-destructive testing.

"A picture is worth a thousand words," said Le. "By the same token, one measurement is worth a thousand guesses."

Le gets up close and personal with gun tubes using high tech equipment found exclusively at YPG, but also uses the same cannon tube bore scope commonly used by artillery units in the field. It is a job he has performed for nearly a quarter of a century, spanning the tail end of the Cold War to the present day, and his reputation for diligence and expertise extends across the armed forces.

"He gets asked for by name," said Hector Herrera, site manager for the



David Le, mechanical engineer, gets up close and personal with gun tubes using high tech equipment found exclusively at Yuma Proving Ground, but also uses the same cannon tube bore scope commonly used by artillery units in the field.

(LOANED PHOTO)

M777 howitzer. "He is well known and he is good. I've never seen a gentleman who takes so much pride in each inspection and is so thorough, whether it is howitzers, mortars or cannon tubes."

Le says his career was greatly influenced by mentor Terry Davis, formerly the shop's lead engineering technician and now a consultant.

"David came here right after completing his schooling," recalled Davis. "When he came, we didn't really have anyone else that knew anything about it. David is sharp and he wanted to learn, so I took him under my wing and it worked."

Over the years, Davis and Le constructed a clean room and began adding and developing specialized measurement devices, such as a laser bore mapper, from scratch. Often, a howitzer under test would break down late in the work day, and testers with a tight schedule and expensive range time already scheduled would bring the weapon in for repairs. In many instances, Le would conduct his comprehensive inspection to identify any structural failures, and if present, Davis would fabricate replacement parts to continue with the mission.

"Terry can fabricate anything," said Julio Dominguez, YPG Technical Director. "If something on a test item broke and it wasn't critical to what we were testing on the item, and if it wouldn't affect the test results in any way, he would just fabricate it."

In doing this, the shop saved test customers time and money, but accumulated significant levels of overtime work for themselves without complaint. Whereas, waiting for a replacement part could halt a test for days, Davis and Le usually brought the item back into service for the next day. With this customer-centered ethos, YPG gradually has become the Army's premier location for non-destructive testing. Virtually every mortar and artillery system tested or developed in the past 25 years has spent time under Le's careful scrutiny.

"It's so easy to say, 'no, we can't do it,'" said Davis. "Our attitude was, 'Let's try it; what's the worst that could happen?' Well, there were very few things we weren't able to do. This became a one-stop shop, and that's why the customers came."

"One thing I learned from Terry is to never give up trying to find a better

way to do things," added Le. "That's what we try to do here."

Appropriately, both men were recently inducted into the Honorable Order of Saint Barbara, a prestigious honor society for those associated with artillery in the United States Army or Marine Corps. The ceremony took place recently at the Physical Test Facility, and was well attended by co-workers and customers.

"They put the customers' needs before their own," said Keith Gooding, program manager for towed artillery. "They always understood that the real customer is that Marine or Soldier who is going to be using these guns."

"One of the characteristics about David is he's never looking at the now; he's always looking ahead at what's out there," added Dominguez.

Despite his quarter century of service, Le is looking ahead to many more years at the proving ground.

"I love working here," said Le. "I never think about retiring or working somewhere else, because what I love to do is right here. I see the result of my work."



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Operation Clean Sweep to ensure inventory accountability

By Staff Sgt. Tina Villalobos

A kick-off meeting took place late last month to initiate Operation Clean Sweep—the Army's full-scale inspection of its property books, inventory items and overview of accountability methodologies. YPG's Operation Clean Sweep will run until November.

As the military adopts a post-war posture, taking a step back to ensure accountability in aligning resources is crucial. As experience as shown, the sense of urgency and reactionary measures adopted during war-time operations can easily contribute to circumventing normal procedures. These Army procedures exist to ensure that we have a clear understanding and accountability of our resources. To restore our sense of alignment, the Army has initiated this major effort.

The purpose of Operation Clean Sweep is to ensure that inventory lists and transactions are accurate, and war-time needs have been properly accounted for and addressed. Situations such as a high operational tempo, continuous deployments, new equipment fielding, and an enormous training load can take their toll, and result in situations such as a buildup of equipment, or non-serviceable equipment not being promptly processed.

There are five phases to YPG's Operation Clean Sweep, and organizations will be considered 'clean

swept' upon completion of all of the phases – and when all due-outs are complete. YPG's Operation Clean Sweep initiatives include training for supply technicians and hand receipt holders.

Operation Clean Sweep will entail the review of all property books to ensure proper use of Property Book Identification Codes and Type Authorization Codes. Weapons are being properly accounted for in June. All sensitive items will be reviewed the following month. All hand receipted items and items found to be not on hand receipts will be addressed.

Subsequent to completion of Operation Clean Sweep, the Army will redistribute excess items in order to more efficiently and effectively address requirements and save taxpayer dollars. Another element of the effort is the efficient use of space and over-all cost savings. Installations throughout the Army can maximize space by removing unserviceable or unneeded items. These items can then be repaired and/or redistributed, which can result in substantial savings.

Much like balancing a checkbook, having a clean property book will allow our organizations to feel a sense of confidence in their ability to provide goods and services to customers. Operation Clean Sweep not only works to improve the property accountability of individual organizations, but also contributes to the Army's overall readiness posture.

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VIEWPOINTS

Furloughs for all Department of Defense civilians are slated to begin July 8, and while no one is looking forward to losing 20 percent of their salary for nearly three months, YPG employees are being philosophical and looking for this particular cloud's silver lining. We asked members of the workforce, "How will you spend your furlough time?"



Mardy Clark
family support chief

More hours off means more hours on the golf course. Any day I can play more golf is a good day. It means more exercise and a chance to clear my head in the outdoors and take my aggressions out on the golf ball.

Sal Gomez
contracting officer
representative, DOL

I'm going to enjoy the two hours of extra sleep I get. An alternative work schedule was part of our union agreement, so my furlough hours will be first thing in the morning instead of in the afternoon.



Gordon Wiborg
plans and operations
chief, DPTMS

The two words, fur and low, mean a lot to me because I have two dogs who are my kids, and I am going to spend quality time with them while I am furloughed. To me, you have to make the most positive outcome you can out of a negative situation. We're all losing something, but it gives me additional time, and time is valuable.



Why Veterans Affairs is buried in disability claims

By Lt. Col. Daniel Gade

For a sense of how the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is coping with an unprecedented number of disability claims, consider that nationwide, nearly 900,000 disability claims are backlogged or sitting in the processing queue. Veterans wait, on average, 273 days for their claims to be processed. For new claimants from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the wait is 327 days. In some claims centers, the average wait approaches two years.

Budget cuts are not to blame. The VA's 2013 budget is \$140.3 billion—more than double the 2001 level, adjusting for inflation. And it's not that the VA hasn't made enormous efforts to address the problem: For each of the past three years, VA claims-processors have managed to handle more than one million claims.

The VA has identified a number of factors driving the claims increase, including higher demand driven by a weak economy, an aging generation of Vietnam veterans and hundreds of thousands of post-9/11 veterans leaving the service. Making matters worse, the move to digital from paper claims is just getting started and the VA and the Defense Department continue to struggle in implementing compatible medical-records systems.

But the biggest issue by far is how the current system defines "disability." The average American may picture a disabled veteran as a wartime amputee, burn patient or wheelchair user. Fortunately, this isn't the case. The number of major amputations from Iraq and Afghanistan combined is

less than 2,000, and the number of serious burns is around 2,500.

The reality is that the majority of veterans' disability claims are for post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or minor physical conditions, including common age-related ailments such as hearing loss, lower-back pain and arthritis. Furthermore, 62 percent of the claims in the backlog of unprocessed claims are not first-time claimants, but are from veterans reapplying for increased benefits.

The financial structure of the claims process gives veterans further incentive to make claims. By getting a disability adjusted upward to 90 percent from 70 percent, a veteran will gain an additional \$500 per month. It should come as no surprise, then, that many veterans will appeal or refile their claims in hopes of getting a higher disability rating. There are so many conditions that the VA dubs disabilities that the average veteran in the system now claims more than eight conditions as "disabling." The average during the post-World War II era was one or two.

By categorizing minor conditions as disabilities, the process threatens to become a kind of stealthy welfare system, where those with minor conditions might feather their nests at the expense of both taxpayers and truly disabled veterans trapped behind them in a line that stretches over the horizon. This also harms the veterans who are being told the lie that they are "disabled" and being paid to believe it. Sadly, this process can decrease veterans' work incentives and dull their ability to contribute to society after military service.

The good news is that a small number of simple steps would

result in a more just, streamlined and efficient claims system.

First, the VA's authorizing legislation should be updated so that only true disabilities are compensated. should be labeled as disabilities or compensated as such. Of course, the VA should continue to treat veterans for their service-connected conditions of whatever severity, but the era of labeling a veteran "disabled" for age-related degeneration should end.

Second, the claims currently in the queue should be prioritized. First-time claims should move to the front of the line so that seriously injured veterans can get necessary assistance.

Third, the focus of the entire system should shift to retraining, rehabilitating and reintegrating veterans into the workforce. Those with serious disabilities should be compensated for their pain and reduced quality of life, but they should also be encouraged to work. Paying veterans to stop working is the wrong course for veterans and for broader American society.

The real crisis is not a backlog of claims; it's that the current system is focusing on the wrong goals. Instead of working to push the maximum number of claims through the system, the VA should take a step back and ask what we really owe our veterans.

Lt. Col. Gade is an assistant professor at the U.S. Military Academy. In 2005, he lost his right leg in combat in Iraq. His views do not reflect those of the Defense Department, Army or the U.S. Military Academy. This essay is adapted from an article in the upcoming Summer 2013 issue of National Affairs.

Members of the "Team America" mountain bike racing group, pause for a group photo. Not in this order, they are: Derk Pack, Woody Hunt, Tanner Morgan, Arron Guidry, and Jim Sessions, Aviation Test Director Burt Evans, and Kyle and Eric Smith of Yuma. For the most part, the team rides mountain bikes throughout the Yuma community and Yuma Proving Ground during the months of October through May. As a courtesy, motorists are asked to keep their safety in mind as they commute to and from YPG.

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BIKERS

FROM PAGE 3

From the get-go, Sessions said the team's goal was to win any competition entered, and the Arizona championship, was no different. "We

said, 'we can do this,' and we did it," he said with a smile. There were obstacles, however, that eliminated two members of the team beforehand, though they still took first place.

This caused the remaining guys to work harder to stay in the league, compete and win.

Like any other sport, there are challenges to overcome. When one is used to training in the deserts of Yuma where most of the land is flat, it can be a challenge when you end up in a higher elevation, like these guys did for the championship competition.

"For our bodies to acclimate to the 8,000 foot elevation of Flagstaff,

we had to get there several days beforehand," said Sessions. "If you don't, it's harder on your legs and harder to breathe. This is one of the reasons we take good care of our bodies. We eat right, stay hydrated, rest a lot and, hopefully, this will contribute to a good race."

Mountain bike racing can be costly, with bikes going for as much as \$7,000. Nowadays, bikes are made out of lightweight carbon fiber, which is why it can be an expensive sport. However, there are great benefits.

"First and foremost, there is the physical fitness you gain from riding," explained Sessions. "Then, there is the great feeling of riding early in the morning and breathing fresh air, especially when you get to the top of one of the mountains and pause to appreciate the peacefulness of the great outdoors." However," he said with a great smile, "the biggest benefit is that it builds camaraderie and is a great stress reliever.

"...the biggest benefit is that it builds camaraderie and is a great stress reliever."

— Jim Sessions, instructor at the Military Freefall School

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Dr. Aiello received his MD degree from the University of Michigan. After completing both an Internship and Residency in Internal Medicine at the University of North Carolina, he finished a Residency in Ophthalmology at the world renowned Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. He is board certified in both Internal Medicine and Ophthalmology.

In addition to caring for his patients at the Aiello Eye Institute, he is an examiner for the American Board of Ophthalmology, and a clinical instructor for the Midwestern School of Osteopathic Medicine in Phoenix. He is a Retired Air Force Senior Flight Surgeon and State Air Surgeon for the Arizona National Guard with 27 years of military service.

Having performed more than 15,000 surgeries, he is regarded as one of the state's leading eye surgeons.

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