

Ft. Irwin

Ken Hamer

Today's Fort Irwin was first established in 1940 by President Franklin Roosevelt as the Mojave Anti-Aircraft Range, a military reservation of approximately 1000 square miles - about the size of the State of Rhode Island. In 1942, the Mojave Anti-Aircraft Range was renamed Camp Irwin, in honor of Major General George LeRoy Irwin, commander of the 57th Field Artillery Brigade during World War I. Two years later, Camp Irwin was deactivated and placed on surplus status.

Camp Irwin reopened its gates in 1951 as the Armored Combat Training Area and served as a training center for combat units during the Korean War. Regimental tank companies of the 43d Infantry Division from Camp Pickett, Virginia were the first to train at the new facility.

The post was designated a permanent installation on 1 August 1961 and renamed Fort Irwin. During the Vietnam buildup, many units, primarily artillery and engineer, trained and deployed from Fort Irwin.

In January 1971, the post was deactivated again and placed in maintenance status under the control of Fort MacArthur (Los Angeles), California. The California National Guard assumed full responsibility for the post in 1972. From 1972 to late 1980, Fort Irwin was used primarily as a training area by the National Guard and reserve components.

On August 9, 1979, the Department of the Army announced that Fort Irwin had been selected as the site for the National Training Center. With over 1000 square miles for maneuver and ranges, an uncluttered electromagnetic spectrum, airspace restricted to military use, and its isolation from densely populated areas, Fort Irwin was an ideal site for a National Training Center. The National Training Center was officially activated October 16, 1980 and Fort Irwin returned to active status on July 1, 1981.

Since its activation, the National Training Center has witnessed many firsts. The first unit to train against the Opposing Force at the NTC were from 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division in January 1982. Infantry and engineer units first augmented the Opposing Force in 1984. June 1984 saw the first use of M1 Abrams tanks and M2 Bradley fighting vehicles on the National Training Center battle field. The first armored cavalry squadron rotation occurred in November 1984. Units from the 101st Airborne Division participated in the first light force rotation in March 1985. The 197th Infantry Brigade participated in the first extended rotation with brigade operations in June 1985. The first urban terrain mission was conducted at the National Training Center Pioneer Training Facility in December 1993.

The National Training Center and Fort Irwin continue to serve as the Army's premier training center. Fort Irwin is the only facility where the U.S. Army can train with active fire from every weapon in their arsenal. Officials from many countries have visited the National Training Center and use it as a model to build their own training centers. As in the past, Fort Irwin pits soldiers against a harsh environment, but now adds a determined and formidable opposing force. As during World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Desert Storm, the National Training Center and Fort Irwin continue to train units to fight and win on the battle field.

During our 2015 toy-delivery visit, we learned that the soldiers stationed at Fort Irwin are there for a minimum two-year rotation. During this time they act as the "opposing force" (OPFOR) to the units that visit for mandatory training prior to being deployed overseas to the middle east. The OPFOR's mission is to drive the training units to the point of failure, because it is only through failure that each unit, and each soldier in that unit, can become strong enough to handle what they will encounter during their deployment.

Continued on Page 7

Ft. Irwin

Continued from Page 6

The soldiers who make up the OPFOR spend three continuous weeks out in the "box" (short for the "sandbox" - the field, the Mojave Desert) away from their families and the base facilities. The 4th week is spent back at the main base facilities reviewing the training they were part of, repairing their equipment and getting ready to go back out for another three weeks in the box. They do this all year-around. The only times they are permitted to take leave is during the December holiday period and Spring Break. We all know how hot the summer months get to be in the Mojave Desert. That is when our military is working the hardest.

God bless each and every one of them for their service, their commitment and for what they do for all of us!



Toys for Ft. Irwin

December 20, 2015

Judy and I met Phil and Mary Leatherman at their home early on Sunday morning, the day after their outstanding toy drive Christmas party, and followed them out to Fort Irwin. Along the way Steve and Beth Backer joined the group in Cajon Pass. And later on, Ric and Jackie Carr from the National Street Rod Association joined our little convoy.

Sergeant Major Randy Cheadle, from the Fort Irwin Directorate of Emergency Services, met us at the Main Gate and escorted us into the main base area where we unloaded the trailer full of toys for the soldiers' kids and the boxes and bags of women's clothes for the soldiers wives. We were joined there by Command Sergeant Major Daniel O'Brien. CSM O'Brien had only arrived at Fort Irwin a few days before, in fact he was on his 4th day of duty, and was completely blown away by the generosity of the SoCal hot rod community towards the kids and wives of the soldiers at this out-of-the-way military facility. He "guesstimated" that there were over \$20,000 worth of toys in the pile we left from "Santa".

After unloading the toys and clothes, we were treated to a tour of the base stockade since both Sgt. Major Cheadle and CSM O'Brien are part of the Military Police at Fort Irwin. Outside we had the pleasure of meeting "Rambo" and his handler. Rambo is a Belgian Malinois K9 member of the MP contingent at Fort Irwin.

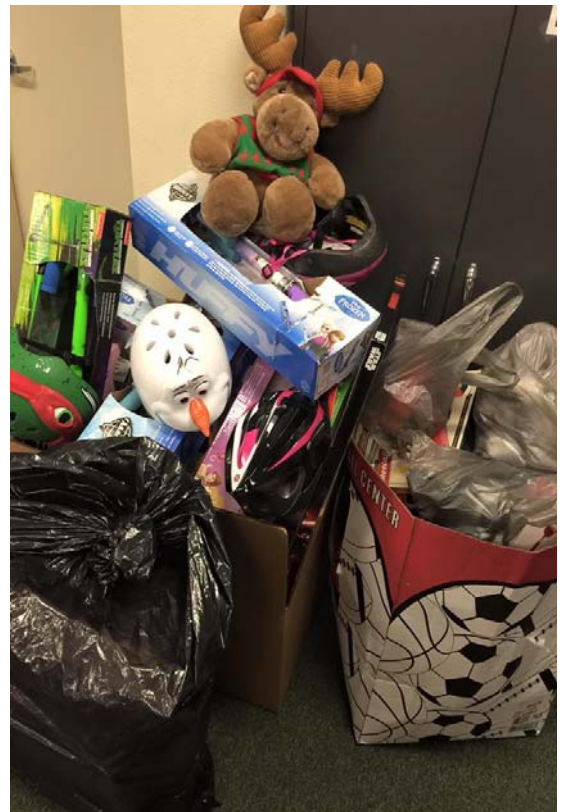
After touring the stockade we all went to lunch at the only on-base facility open that day - Pizza Hut. We had a very nice lunch and learned much more about Fort Irwin and the mission of the soldiers stationed there (part of which is mentioned in this month's President's Message).

We also learned that it is possible for civilians to watch some of the intense training that goes on at Fort Irwin to prepare our military for what they will find when they're deployed to the Middle East. Sgt. Major Cheadle said he would check into it for any Inland Mopars members that may be interested. We will discuss this further at the January meeting to see who may be interested.



Toys for Ft. Irwin

Continued from Page 8



Toys for Ft. Irwin

Continued from Page 9



Toys for Ft. Irwin

Continued from Page 10

