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Fort Sill rebalances branch representation

By Ms. Marie Berberea (TRADOC) March 2, 2015



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FORT SILL, Okla. -- While the Fires Center of Excellence is home to field artillery and air defense artillery, its decor is focused on the school that has been here longer.

Maj. Gen. John Rossi, FCoE and Fort Sill commanding general is evening that out.

The "Rebalance Effort" includes the recent placement of an M163 Vulcan Air Defense System at Key Gate East and a Chaparral Air Defense System at Bentley Gate.

"The Chaparral screams air defense," said David Christensen, ADA Command historian. "It has those heat seeking Sidewinder missiles, you know the ones Tom Cruise uses in 'Top Gun,' so everybody loves the Chap."

When air defense artillery moved to Fort Sill from Fort Bliss, Texas, in 2008 it was welcomed with new facilities, but the walls and space in common areas were slightly overlooked. Seen through the eyes of an air defender, Christensen said he can see why it seems tipped toward the field artillery branch.

"I was one of the first hires in 2009," said Christensen. "You know you put up the Stinger statue, a 'First to Fires' statue, the Costello Room, all these things ... until we got a (commanding general) that came here as an air defender I wasn't even really seeing what he saw because I grew up here. You just don't see how unbalanced it was."

Christensen, who along with other post leaders and organizations, is working to create a symmetrical environment. He said as you walk through the Patriot Club, for example, the walls featured field artillery history. Rossi asked where the air defense history was.

That has been remedied and Christensen along with Susan's Framing in Lawton is currently transforming the Fireside Room into the Quads and Dusters Room.

Snow Hall, one of the buildings where many air defenders pass through for training, is also showcasing more ADA history with a western hall designated as Tedesco Wing as of last week.

Snow Hall

Named after Vincent Tedesco, who retired after 27 years of service, he commanded thousands of Soldiers. He was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action, the Bronze Star, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star for his service in Vietnam. He is the honorary colonel of the 44th Air Defense Artillery Regiment.

Stairs leading up to Room 215, or the new ADA Heritage Room, features prints with plaques describing battles from World War I, when the air defense first became a service at the Post Artillery Corps, through Desert Storm.

Christensen said the ADA Heritage Room is in its first stages of completion with prints and memorabilia from World War I through the current Guam mission using Terminal High Altitude Area Defense.

He said it's not just about artwork and photographs depicting ADA culture, there is also a new Air Defense Research Lab (Room 255) in Snow Hall. Christensen gathered 2,000 books from different libraries in the area on ADA and military history. There are also six computers with access to JSTOR, a digital library of academic journals.

The lab is across from Christensen's office so he is an added resource for Soldiers.

ADA community

Other areas that will showcase ADA history include the Lawton Fort Sill Airport where Christensen said Raytheon and Lockheed Martin are working to supply pieces.

"So when you come to Lawton-Fort Sill you know that air defense is here as well."

Christensen said the rebalance effort is only complete in its first stage and the second and third will include a Patriot missile displayed at Key Gate and an Avenger at Scott Gate.

Editors note: Fort Sill garrison; Department of Public Works; Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation along with Jonathan Bernstein, Supervisory Museum Curator; Frank Siltman, Museums and History director and Joe Gallagher, deputy to the commanding general, made the ADA rebalance efforts possible.