

# 'Air Attack' Brigade enjoys FREEDOM FIESTA

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The 11th Air Defense Artillery "Air Attack" Brigade, which Col. Forrest Smith commands, has been quite active this summer with the events of Freedom Fiesta. Freedom Fiesta, now in its fifth year, originated in 2003 to welcome back the Soldiers of Fort Bliss from Operation Iraqi Freedom. This event was a means of showing appreciation to Soldiers and their families. It has since evolved into a month long celebration honoring the region's military members and their families for selfless service to our great nation. 11th ADA Bde. knows that by being a friend and supporter of the community where they operate, positive relationships are built. As they do this on a broader basis, there's a story that unfolds which also has a positive impact on the way people think of and value the Army.

This year's Fiesta kicked off with the Soldier Appreciation Picnic sponsored by Raytheon. Scores of Soldiers from across Fort Bliss participated – hundreds from 11th ADA Bde. Biggs Water Park was the site of seemingly endless free food, beverages, entertainment and games.

The following Monday, Lockheed Martin, in conjunction with Prime Irrigation and Landscaping, sponsored a Golf Challenge at Coronado Country Club. Twenty-five teams were sponsored by local businesses to play in a Four-Man Scramble Tournament. Three Soldiers and a community businessman comprised each team. A hearty buffet and awards ceremony culminated the day's events, in which several 11th ADA Bde. teams participated.

Armed Forces Day ensued the next Saturday. Following Lockheed Martin's Freedom Run, 11th ADA Bde. was once again out in full force. More than 20 static equipment displays were made available for demonstration to the community by 11th ADA Bde. The Annual Sergeants Major Association Chili Cook Off was a part of this event as well. In line with their reputation, 11th ADA Bde. Soldiers received accolades for the Best Overall Display, as well as Best Chili.

Pay Day at Wet & Wild was sponsored by FirstLight Federal Credit Union a week later. Free admission for Soldiers and discounted rates for family members were granted that day. Every sub-

ordinate unit of 11th ADA Bde. was remarkably represented. The Association of the United States Army provided food free of charge, contributing to the event's appeal.

The "Air Attack" Bde. seemed to thoroughly enjoy Military Night at El Paso Speedway, sponsored by Casa Ford. Modified, super stock and street stock racing highlighted the night. Smith opened the night's events by giving thanks to all the community sponsors and organizers who consistently show unwavering support for his troops.

The pre-race barbeque, sponsored by AUSA, seemed to be as big a hit as the main event. The display of fireworks in conjunction with patriotic music added a perfect finishing touch.

The Armed Services Blood Program coordinated a Yellow Ribbon Blood Drive the next morning. The 11th ADA Bde.'s Family Readiness Support assistant led the way in recruiting volunteers and ensuring that blood would be collected for Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Give-a-ways and door prizes were awarded to some of the multitude of Soldiers under Smith's command that elected to participate. Due to the brigade's efforts, the collection goal of 150 pints was made within the six hours allotted.

A week later, Soldiers were invited to watch El Paso history come alive during Viva! El Paso at McKelligon Canyon Amphitheater. Casa Ford and First Light Federal Credit Union sponsored this event. In addition to Smith, scores of his Soldiers celebrated the 400-year history of the border area with song, dance and drama. Some 5,000 tickets were purchased, with a large number being utilized by 11th ADA Bde. Soldiers who have come to enjoy socializing with various community "partners."

The end of June saw the end of the 2007 Freedom Fiesta. Volunteers and community sponsors such as Raytheon, Casa Ford, FirstLight Federal Credit Union, El Paso Times, AUSA, Sam's Club, Miratek and many, many more were recognized at a reception hosted by Fort Bliss Commanding General Maj. Gen. Robert P. Lennox. It was abundantly clear that though it may be hard work to become vested in a community, the benefits are perpetual. Honoring and serving the nation begins with honoring and serving those closest to us.



COURTESY PHOTOS  
Soldiers, families and friends of the 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade enjoyed the Freedom Fiesta activities sponsored by local companies and businesses.