

Photo by Stephen Baack

Brig. Gen. Antoinette Gant, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' South Pacific Division commander, speaks with students at Southeast Academy High School Jan. 13 in Norwalk, California. Gant joined three district commanders, including LA District commander Col. Julie Balten, to meet with students and discuss opportunities for service to the nation through military and civilian careers with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

**BY STEPHEN BAACK
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

NORWALK, Calif. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' South Pacific Division commander joined three district commanders to speak to students at Southeast Academy High School Jan. 13 in Norwalk, California, and helped present five-figure scholarships to two students.

Brig. Gen. Antoinette Gant was accompanied by Col. Julie Balten, Los Angeles District commander; Col. Chad Caldwell, Sacramento District commander; and Lt. Col. Kevin Arnett, San Francisco District commander, met with students and academic leaders to discuss opportunities for service to the nation through military and civilian careers with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Gant kicked off the visit by addressing a morning assembly of students, focusing on top-

ics such as leadership, service and making the best of opportunities to better oneself and those in one's orbit.

"To be accepted into this academy and do what you are doing is quite significant," Gant told the students. "That's dedication and hard work. Congratulations to all of you because what you are doing now is helping set you up for success later."

Gant said that doesn't necessarily mean military service; it means being a good citizen, and learning and practicing the core values, qualities and skills the school offers. One of those skills is leadership.

"We always say that leadership is not just a noun; it is an action," she said. "Everything you do is about helping make others better and the ability to influence others."

A person doesn't need to be in a leadership position to be a leader, she added. Leaders can positively influence and inspire others, regard-

less of rank or a job title. With her visit falling on the Friday before Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Gant related many of her topics — especially leadership and service — to him.

"Service is about giving more of yourself than you expect in return — or even not expecting anything back," Gant said. "Dr. King did that every day, such as with the many boycotts he led, being able to go into the White House to advocate for those things that would make the country better and giving the 'I Have a Dream' speech.

"He says in that speech he wants to make sure that one day that his four kids are not judged by their color, but of the content of their character and what they actually do," she added. "Because of that, you're able to be in the positions you are and be able to participate in such a great school, like Southeast Academy."

['ACADEMY' continued on Page 11](#)

Inside this issue: How the LA District jumped into action, supported Southern California during recent storm events



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LA District town hall



Photos by Dena O'Dell

TOP PHOTO: Brig. Gen. Antoinette Gant, commander of the South Pacific Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Col. Julie Balten, commander of the Corps' Los Angeles District, lead a town hall for LA District employees Jan. 12 at the LA District headquarters building in downtown LA.

Topics included talent management, environmental justice, engineering with nature and the South Pacific Division's new strategic vision statement: "Delivering bold solutions to serve and strengthen all communities." Gant concluded the town hall by telling employees she enjoys coming to work every day and hopes they feel the same.

"Being a member of the Corps of Engineers and helping our organization deliver essential projects and helping our communities means so much. I heard someone say 'the work that we do doesn't just last right now or for five years; it lasts for lifetimes. People go back to them, point to them and say, 'I had a part in doing that.' And so many of you will have the same opportunity."

BOTTOM PHOTO: Brig. Gen. Antoinette Gant, commander of the South Pacific Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, right, presents a coin to Rochelle Smith, realty specialist with the LA District's Real Estate Division, center, for work she performed with the Fort Irwin Land Expansion project following a Jan. 12 town hall at the LA District headquarters in downtown LA.

Also pictured is Col. Julie Balten, commander of the Corps' Los Angeles District, left. Others receiving recognition, but not pictured, were Derek Walker, project manager with the LA District's Mega Division, for work he performed on the Santa Ana River Mainstem Project, and Andrew McLarty, geologist with the district's Engineering Division, for work he performed on the Rio de Flag and San Luis Rey projects.

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Celebrating legacy of service, sacrifice, during Black History Month

Hello, SPL Team!

Although this is the January issue of the NewsCastle, I'd like to highlight the annual commemoration of Black History Month, during which the Los Angeles District joins the rest of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Army and the nation in recognizing the tremendous contributions and sacrifices Black Americans have made throughout more than 246 years of service to our country.

Black History is not just a month; it is an inseparable part of the history of this country. I challenge all of you to reflect on this legacy of courage, selfless service and sacrifice throughout the year and how important our diverse workforce is to the success of our mission.

African Americans have been serving in the military in countless capacities since the Revolutionary War, and their part to shaping our great nation is truly incalculable. They make up about 19 percent of our total Army and serve at every level of military leadership. Many come from a long line of military service, whether it was their parents, grandparents or even their great-grandparents, who served a country that did not honor their citizenship in many ways.



COL. JULIE A. BALTEN
LA DISTRICT COMMANDER

Our differences and our different cultures make our communities and our Army strong and resilient. Each of us brings unique and valuable resources to the table, which only makes our Army stronger.

The Army embraces the different attributes, experiences and backgrounds of our Soldiers, civilians and family members. Diversity enhances our global capabilities. It contributes to an adaptive and culturally astute Army. We are dedicated to ensuring that everyone, who is able and willing to serve can do so, regardless of skin color, gender, sexuality or religious beliefs.

During Black History Month in February, the Army will highlight the achievements and contributions of Black Americans to the Army and our nation as a Diverse, Equal and Inclusive organization where all have the opportunity to reach their full potential. For more information about these contributions, visit <https://www.army.mil/blackamericans/?from=features>.

Every member of our team is critical in ensuring the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stays true to its mission of delivering vital engineering solutions, in collaboration with our partners, to secure our nation, energize our economy and

reduce disaster risk. It is my sincere belief that our willingness and ability to incorporate the unique perspectives of every member of our diverse team is a force multiplier.

NATIONAL ENGINEERS WEEK

Speaking of celebrating contributions, from Feb. 19 to 25, we will be celebrating all of you during National Engineers Week!

National Engineers Week was formed in 1951 by the National Society of Professional Engineers and Army engineers to showcase the critical role of engineers in the growth and welfare of our nation.

It is observed by public, private and educational sector engineers every February during the week of George Washington's birthday and provides a platform to emphasize the importance of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills.

By recognizing the contributions engineers – like yourselves – make to society, it ensures a diverse and well-educated future engineering workforce by increasing understanding of and interest in engineering and technology careers. So thank you for all you do as engineers for our nation!

Sincerely,

Col. Julie A. Balten

Around the District

"What I like most about working for the Corps of Engineers is the people and knowing that what I do supports our nation."

William is working on new servers and making sure users have proper access to digital resources. He is from Avondale, Arizona, and has worked with USACE for three years.



William Eastwood
System Administrator



LA District supports water conservation efforts during recent Southern California storms



Photo by Dena O'Dell

Following recent storms, elevated water levels are pictured Jan. 18 at Prado Dam in Corona, California.

BY DENA O'DELL
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA — During recent rainstorm events in Southern California, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District and the Orange County Water District worked collaboratively to maximize the water supply benefits of the Santa Ana River that reaches Prado Dam.

From Nov. 1 through rain events that ended in mid-January, Orange County Water District captured an estimated 33,000 acre-feet of river water – enough water to supply 264,000 people for a year. Water released by the Corps from Prado Dam is managed by the Orange County Water District and put into the Orange County Groundwater Basin, which provides water to 2.5 million people in northern and central Orange County. The Corps operates Prado Dam with the primary purpose of flood-risk management. Water conservation – referred to as “stormwater capture in California” – is an authorized purpose and benefit of the project.

Also, of note, Los Angeles County, in coordination with the LA District, were able to conserve 68,000 acre-feet of stormwater runoff from the Los Angeles County Drainage System since Oct. 1, 2022.



Photo by Dena O'Dell

A deluge of stormwater flows down a channel Jan. 18 at Prado Dam in Corona, California.

[More photos on Page 5](#)



Photo by Stephen Baack

Water from recent storms in Southern California is pictured Jan. 27 at the Santa Fe Dam in Irwindale, California.



Photo by Stephen Baack



Photo by Stephen Baack

ABOVE: Water collected from the January storms in Southern California is released and directed Jan. 27 down the Santa Fe Dam spillway into the San Gabriel River in Irwindale, California.

LEFT: Water pools Jan. 27 at Santa Fe Dam in Irwindale, California. Santa Fe Dam is an essential element of the Los Angeles County Drainage Area flood-control system.

Emergency dredging

LA District goes to work in Santa Barbara Harbor in wake of January storms



A survey vessel performs surveying of the harbor prior to the start of emergency dredging operations Jan. 25 at Santa Barbara Harbor in Santa Barbara, California.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DENA O'DELL
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District's Navigation Branch, in coordination with Santa Barbara County, recently completed emergency dredging operations in the entrance channel at Santa Barbara Harbor.

The Corps' contractor, Pacific Dredge & Construction, San Diego, began dredging 35,000 cubic yards of material out of the channel Jan. 25 to allow larger boats in and out of the harbor. Due to recent storm events in the area, about nine feet of material blocked the channel, entrapping a Coast Guard vessel.

"It was a result of the big storms that were up north in the Pacific, and the large waves that carried the material along the sand and along the shore here," said Jim Fields, section chief with the LA District's Navigation Branch.

The contractor's all-electric dredge, the Sandpiper, was able to clear out the channel —

dredging it to -15 feet within three days — to allow safe, navigable waters for all ships entering and exiting the harbor.

"This was a big step in moving forward with this emergency dredging because we needed to get in here and clear the channel," Fields said. "It was blocked as a result of those storms, which made it unsafe for navigation. We really wanted to ensure people and properties are protected here."

The 35,000 cubic yards of material dredged from the channel were placed on the East Beach to provide beach nourishment.

Additionally, the Corps recently awarded Pacific Dredge & Construction a three-year contract to continue bi-annual maintenance dredging of Santa Barbara Harbor.

Normal maintenance dredging of the harbor is expected to resume in mid-February and be completed by mid-April. During the upcoming dredging cycle, about another 150,000 cubic yards of material are expected to be dredged and placed on the East Beach.

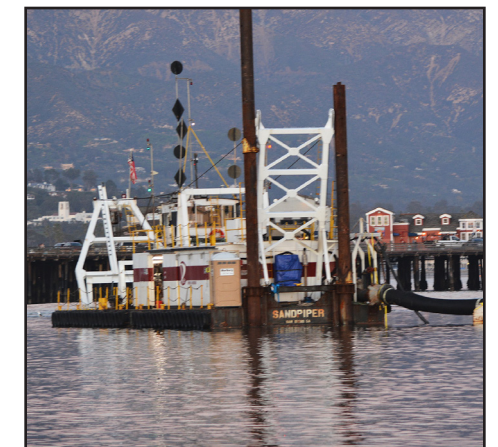


Pictured is a dredging pipe set down for emergency dredging operations Jan. 25 on the beach near Santa Barbara Harbor in Santa Barbara, California.

[More photos on Page 7](#)



Jim Fields, Navigation Branch section chief, talks about the emergency management dredging project during a Jan. 25 interview with Dan Collins, LA District Public Affairs, at Santa Barbara Harbor in Santa Barbara, California.



ABOVE: The all-electric cutter-head suction dredge "Sandpiper" sits in the Santa Barbara Harbor before emergency dredging operations Jan. 25 in Santa Barbara, California. The Sandpiper is one of very few electric dredges in California and is used to dredge Santa Barbara channel twice per year to keep the channel open year-round.

LEFT: Equipment operated by the LA District's contractor, Pacific Dredge & Construction, San Diego, moves dredging pipes in preparation for emergency dredging operations Jan. 25 on the beach near Santa Barbara Harbor in Santa Barbara, California.

LA District Emergency Management Branch supports Santa Barbara debris-removal mission



Photo by Dena O'Dell

Louis Munoz, Emergency Management specialist with the LA District's Emergency Management Branch, right, and Delvin Rivas, deputy area engineer with the LA District's High Dessert Area Office, discuss the debris mission Jan. 24 at the Santa Monica Debris Basin in Carpinteria, California. Both Munoz and Rivas deployed to Santa Barbara in January to provide technical assistance to the county.

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District — on behalf of Santa Barbara County, FEMA and the State of California — was recently asked to support a debris removal mission in Santa Barbara, California.

During recent rainfall events in January, the county received 11 inches of rain, which filled many of the debris basins to capacity. The LA District is providing technical assistance to the county in regard to 11 debris basins.

Louis Munoz, Emergency Management specialist with the LA District's Emergency Management Branch, and Delvin Rivas, deputy area engineer with the LA District's High Dessert Area Office, deployed to Santa Barbara in January to provide technical assistance to the county.

Both Louis and Delvin previously deployed with the LA District for a debris removal mission to Santa Barbara in January 2018, following an early morning debris flow in Montecito, California, that took the lives of 23 people. Louis served as the mission manager for the LA District at that time, as the district assisted

Santa Barbara County with clearing out and removing debris from 11 of the county's debris basins over a three-month period.

We recently caught up with Munoz Jan. 24 in Santa Barbara to discuss the recent debris removal mission.

WHAT IS YOUR TITLE?

Louis Munoz, Emergency Management specialist with the Emergency Management Branch, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE IN SANTA BARBARA?

I'm here with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers supporting Santa Barbara County, as requested by the State of California and FEMA, to provide technical assistance to the county to recover from the recent rainstorms and floods that occurred in Santa Barbara County.

WHAT ARE YOU ADVISING THE COUNTY ON?

What we are doing here, at this time, is

providing technical assistance to the county. We are sharing some of our experiences that we learned from the 2018 event. Some of it is (advising them on) contracting methods, and removal and disposal of the debris that we cleared from the basins. We are helping them answer some of the questions they have.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT IS GOING ON BEHIND YOU?

We are here at the Santa Monica Basin, one of the largest basins in Santa Barbara County, that collected a lot of debris after the recent rainfall. What the county is doing at this time is, it's got contractors in the basin to remove debris and bring the basin back to full capacity.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

It's important that the county do the work to remove the debris that's in this basin as quickly as possible because they want to be prepared for the next storm. When there's an excessive amount of debris within the basin, it

['DEBRIS' continued on Page 9](#)

['DEBRIS' continued from Page 8](#)

has the possibility of plugging the towers that drain the water from it. This basin is protecting the residents downstream of it.

WHY ARE YOU HERE TODAY?

I was here in Santa Barbara during the 2018 debris mission. I was the mission manager. When I found out the LA District received a request (this time) to provide two subject matter experts to the county to assist, I raised my hand. I felt that I would be a strong candidate to assist the county because I had been here before in 2018 and had a relationship with some of the people here at the county. I wanted to help them out in the recovery of this event. I enjoy working with the county. It's been a pleasure to work with them and to be able to help the residents here.

HOW IS THIS MISSION DIFFERENT FROM THE DEBRIS REMOVAL MISSION IN SANTA BARBARA IN 2018?

In 2018, I was one of the first people here to deploy to assist the county in recovery ... I was the mission manager. One of the things we found here on site was the debris basin — all of the outlets were plugged, and the basin was full of muddy water and debris from the floods and the mudslides. This (current) event is a much lesser degree than the one we had in 2018. We don't have as much material (in the basin) that came from the upper levels of the basin (in 2018).

In 2018, when I was here, we saw a lot of large boulders, large debris that had come from the hillsides. Some of these boulders were 20- to 30-feet tall, and we had to have the contractor break them up with hydraulic hammers to break them down, so they would be small enough to haul away in trucks.

We haven't seen any rock that is near the sizes that we saw at that time. This allows the trucks to haul the debris, rock and vegetation out of here much faster than what they did in 2018.

To compare the size of those rocks, some of them were the size of vehicles — Volkswagen bugs and even larger ... the devastation that those boulders created added to the danger of the mudslide to the local residents (in 2018).

It was quite an effort for the county and the contractors to remove all of that material and make this area safe and navigable again. The streets (in 2018) were blocked with much of this mud and rock debris.

According to Douglas Toews, civil engineer specialist with the County of Santa Barbara Department of Public Works, who was on site during our interview Jan. 24 at the Santa Monica Basin, during this most recent rain event in January 2023, about 11 inches of rain was recorded within a 24-hour time frame above the Santa Monica Basin. During the 2018 event, three inches of rain occurred over the same time span.

WHAT WAS DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS RAIN EVENT, COMPARED TO THE JANUARY 2018 RAIN EVENT?

While there was less rain in 2018 than what we recently had in 2023, this was less of an impact because the inflow in 2018 was directly after the Thomas Fire in the fall of 2017. That material came from the burn scars and a lot of non-vegetated areas from the hillsides that didn't have any roots to hang on to anymore because they had been burnt during the previous fire.

WHY DO YOU VOLUNTEER WITH THE EMERGENCY PLANNING AND RESPONSE TEAM?

The first mission I volunteered for was in Florida after one of the hurricanes in 2005. I supported the San Francisco District on a logistics team. ... I kind of got the bug after that. I was able to assist in that mission by inspecting temporary housing units that had been deployed for local (residents) to use, who were affected by the event, and I also worked as a logistical person, handing out water to those who needed it. That got volunteering in my blood. Since that time, I have done a number of missions — from tornados, hurricanes and floods, to wildfires here in California.

I found the more experience I gained (in deploying for emergency missions), the more I was able to provide to the mission and felt my experience was used to make those missions run better. It also helped me as a supervisor for operations. It allowed me to learn more about managing individuals in crisis events.

Flashback to Santa Barbara in 2018



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers file photos



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A house is seen caked inside and out with mud, while a destroyed vehicle and a pile of debris sits in the front yard following a Jan. 9, 2018, debris flow in Montecito, California, a community within Santa Barbara County.

An excavator breaks up and removes large boulders out of the Santa Monica Basin Feb. 27, 2018, in Montecito, California.

A debris flow is pictured Feb. 27, 2018, in Montecito, California.

Burn scars along the mountainsides can be seen from a helicopter Feb. 27, 2018, in Santa Barbara County, California, which are remnants of the Thomas Fire, one of the largest wildfires in California's history at that time.

Safety Tip: ‘Slow and steady wins the race’

In LA traffic, forget the rush! Strive to drive to arrive without incident

BY LA DISTRICT SAFETY OFFICE

LOS ANGELES — When in the Army, one often hears the phrase, “Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast.” It was usually heard during training from instructors to emphasize optimum performance in situations where mistakes could result in loss of lives, property and, ultimately, the mission.

Repeating the mantra (breathing in, performing Step 1) “slow is smooth. ...” (breathing out, performing Step 2) “... Smooth is fast,” had the effect of keeping everyone calm under pressure and focused on the task at hand, especially when the surrounding environment was distracting and chaotic.

It’s a fitting mantra for those of us who must drive in and around Los Angeles on a daily basis. Getting to and from our places of duty often requires us to spend time on the road during peak times of chaotic traffic and road conditions. It behooves all of us to remember that arriving without incident requires additional planning.

In a recent article, the LA Times writes, “Last year in Los Angeles, more people were killed by someone driving a car than by someone wielding a gun. The second-largest U.S. city has become the traffic violence capital of the nation.”

Traffic violence has surged in recent years on city streets. Preliminary city data show 312 people were killed in traffic crashes in 2022, the highest annual death toll in 20 years.

Fatalities rose 5 percent from 2021, previously the deadliest year on record. The number of traffic deaths increased nearly 30 percent from 2020. More than 1,500 people were severely injured in crashes last year, up more than 30 percent over two years.

New York City, with more than double LA’s population, not only had fewer traffic deaths per capita last year, but also fewer deaths overall than LA. — 247, according to that city’s data.

It is highly recommended that when the



Courtesy photo illustration

“Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast,” is a fitting mantra for those who must drive in and around Los Angeles on a daily basis. Getting to and from places of duty often requires us to spend time on the road during peak times of chaotic traffic and road conditions. It behooves all of us to remember that arriving without incident requires additional planning.

job requires driving to various locations in LA that one conducts a risk assessment. Plan to ensure there is enough time to account for hazards on the road that may impede travel. GPS tools are helpful for a rough travel-time calculation, but route planning should also include increased time for unforeseen events and other impacts. Merge earlier than you would’ve normally because it is likely hundreds of other drivers have the same route mapped out by the same GPS tools you are using. It is not uncommon for a single exit off the highway to be backed up by stop-and-go traffic. If you can’t

merge smoothly, continue to the next exit and reroute. And remember to breathe in and repeat to yourself, “Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast.”

The Safety Team wants to hear from you! If you have a Safety Tip of the Week suggestion, tell us about it! Contact your local Safety Office representative and help us build the safest workplace possible.

(Excerpt from LA Times article: <https://www.latimes.com/california/newsletter/2023-01-19/essential-california-2022-traffic-violence-essential-california>.)



Photo by Stephen Baack

Col. Julie Balten, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander, second from right, joins Brig. Gen. Antoinette Gant, the Corps’ South Pacific Division commander, in speaking with students at Southeast Academy High School Jan. 13 in Norwalk, California. Balten was one of three district commanders Gant accompanied to meet with students and discuss opportunities for service to the nation through military and civilian careers with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

‘ACADEMY’ from Page 1

Gant also took special time out and joined the Los Angeles Recruiting Battalion to present five-figure scholarships, on behalf of U.S. Army Cadet Command, to two accomplished cadets toward tuition and fees for any University of California or California State University schools.

“I’m full of emotions right now,” said Southeast Academy senior Evelyn Bejarano, who received one of the two scholarships, alongside classmate Erick Estrada.

“I was crying because back when I was a freshman, although I did have high standards for myself, it doesn’t always register that you’ll get there one day,” she said, along with some advice to her peers: “Being involved in academics, I’ve learned you have to make sacrifices to succeed, but you have to strive for what you want. If you really put your mind to it, you will get there no matter what.

“Once you succeed, plan your next goal,” she added. “I want to be a lawyer, and I want to help my community by standing up for them. My community gives back to me; I want to give back to them.”

After the assembly and presentation, the four Corps’ leaders talked with students about opportunities specific to the Corps.

“What we’re trying to get our young adults to understand is that there are so many oppor-

tunities out there,” Gant said. “One of them just happens to be the military, and in so many different aspects: You can enlist, you can go into ROTC or Officer Candidate School to become an officer, but we are fortunate, especially in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to be able to have our districts incorporated into the communities. The work we do is for the communities. It includes flood-risk manage-

ment and helping under-represented communities, for example.

“The Army, even though the majority of the Corps’ workforce is civilian, is playing a huge role in helping to shape and make their communities that much better,” Gant added. “The students here are on a great path to knowing what it means to be a good citizen in their communities, so having them consider military service is a bonus.”

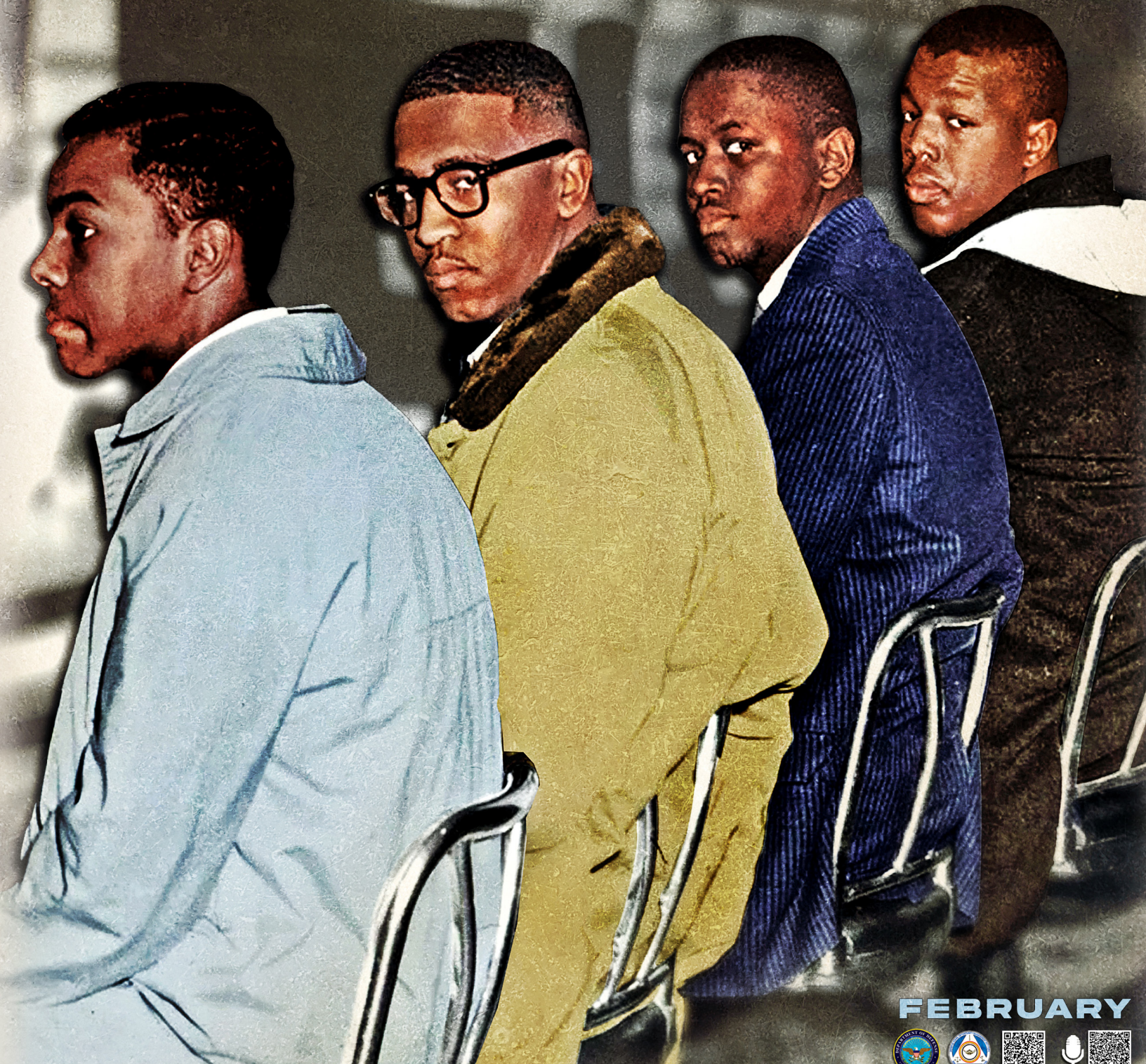


Photo by Stephen Baack

Brig. Gen. Antoinette Gant, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ South Pacific Division commander, third from left, helps present a five-figure scholarship to Evelyn Bejarano, a senior at Southeast Academy in Norwalk, California, during Gant’s Jan. 13 visit to the school.

INSPIRING CHANGE

BLACK
HISTORY
MONTH



FEBRUARY

