

BRAC: A Regional Opportunity

By Paul R. Dordal

PREPARING FOR GROWTH IN THE FORT BRAGG REGION

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The state of North Carolina formed the organization to address issues related to the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Law and other transformational growth actions. The task force serves as the liaison between Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base, the communities, and the state and federal agencies involved in providing assistance and support to communities affected by BRAC 2005 actions.

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brac: a regional

OPPORTUNITY

By Paul R. Dordal

When military communities hear the word “BRAC”, the first thing that comes to mind is base closure and the resulting civilian job losses and economic hardship for the cities and towns surrounding the installation or base.

The Fort Bragg region heard BRAC in early 2004 and thought “opportunity”.

During 2005, then-North Carolina Lt. Governor Bev Perdue led a state effort to keep its military bases open, and by November 2005, the BRAC actions became law and North Carolina’s military installations were the big winners. The federal government ordered the closure of Fort McPherson, south of Atlanta, by September 2011, and the relocation of the U.S. Army Forces Command and the U.S. Army Reserve Command to Fort Bragg by 2011 – a move that would make Fort Bragg the largest Army post in the country. The government also changed the status of Pope AFB – it would now be home to the 440th Air Force Reserve wing from Wisconsin. These moves, while considered economic wins for the region and the state, also would result in a major challenge affecting each community: extraordinary population growth of 40,000 people by 2013 that would affect housing, schools,



Above: North Carolina has the third largest military presence in America. Fort Bragg will be the largest Army post by population in the country.



Left: Fort Bragg was established in 1918 as a field artillery site. By 2011, the installation will be home to the U.S. Army Forces Command and U.S. Army Reserve Command, and more than 65,000 military, civilian, and contractor jobs.

transportation, emergency services, and many other areas of the surrounding communities.

As final details of BRAC 2005 became known, community leaders from several counties came together to focus on the impacts to their communities based on the growth at Fort Bragg.

Key considerations in forming a steering group were to make sure that the planning for mission-

Brigadier General Paul R. Dordal, U.S. Air Force retired, is executive director of the Fort Bragg/Pope Air Force Base BRAC Regional Task Force (pdordal@bractrf.com).

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related growth was coordinated regionally. In January 2006, North Carolina Governor Michael Easley hosted a region-wide stakeholders' kick-off meeting in Raleigh, which included representatives from county and municipality governments. The N.C. Department of Commerce took the lead in organizing the communities, and in June 2006 the BRAC Regional Task Force was formally established to coordinate and unify BRAC 2005 and other transformational growth actions with the surrounding communities.



By this time, the opportunities associated with relocating a major Army headquarters that manages more than \$30 billion of the Department of Defense budget became obvious. County economic developers, regional work-force development boards, regional universities, community colleges, and K-12 schools from the 11 counties were included as partners or stakeholders and four key objectives for the task force were identified and include:

- Plan and prepare regional communities for the changes due to BRAC 2005 and other transformational growth;
- Provide military personnel and their families with information about the region;
- Improve quality of life for both military and the surrounding communities; and
- Develop economic opportunities.

THE GROWTH PARADIGM

Establishing a task force for a BRAC growth community changed the paradigm. The U.S. Department of Defense Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) was chartered to fund communities that were adversely impacted by BRAC through base closure. The BRAC RTF made the case to OEA that although the local military installations and surrounding communities declared "BRAC wins", the region and the installation would be challenged by the impending growth.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Government conducted a study of the region to show the economic impact of BRAC 2005 across the surrounding counties. The study results spoke volumes about the BRAC 2005 impact and how growth at Fort Bragg and Pope AFB would adversely impact and challenge infrastructure, schools, and workforce in the region.

The regional planning approach suggested by the BRAC RTF centers upon a key principle: Organize regionally, optimize locally. Moving the region toward sustainable long-term economic development goals requires community-level planning efforts that are

multi-faceted and regional in scope. The impetus for regional planning must transcend artificial political boundaries, as counties and municipalities realize that infrastructure can be more efficiently planned, funded, and constructed in a regional context.

The BRAC RTF's regional approach to planning was approved by the Office of Economic Adjustment and, in May 2006, the BRAC RTF was recognized by OEA as the regional organization representing the Fort Bragg area.

The BRAC RTF subsequently received a regional planning grant totaling \$1.16 million that would be used to study the BRAC impact on the Fort Bragg region.

The BRAC RTF has taken a unique approach to planning for the impact of

This regional comprehensive planning effort, the first ever of its kind for a BRAC community, has identified implementation actions needed to address the impacts of military growth from a regional perspective and has been recognized by OEA as a model for other BRAC regions to follow.

this influx of personnel by addressing all of the regional planning factors in a Comprehensive Regional Growth Plan (CRGP). The growth plan integrates the impact of mission growth in 12 study areas: Housing; Education (K-12); Workforce Development and Higher Education; Transportation; Information and Communication Technology; Water, Sewer and Solid Waste; Public Safety and Emergency Services; Health Care; Social Services and Child Care; Hospitality; Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources; Regional Planning, Compatible Land Use, and Sustainable Development.

Working groups met for over a year while a contractor pulled together subject matter experts from across the state and a vast number of resources to work with survey data, the military installations, community groups, businesses, and many others to develop a regional planning document that identifies opportunities and challenges in each of the 11 counties. Last October, the BRAC RTF released the final Comprehensive Regional Growth Plan at a large community meeting of more than 450 stakeholders. This regional comprehensive planning effort, the first ever of its kind for a BRAC community, has identified implementation actions needed to address the impacts of military growth from a regional perspective and has been recognized by OEA as a model for other BRAC regions to follow. The BRAC RTF received national recognition by

the Association of Defense Communities and was awarded the Community Innovation Award in 2007 and the Active Base Community of the Year Award in 2008.

The BRAC RTF was recently awarded a follow-on grant from OEA totaling \$1.65 million over the next 18 months to implement the recommendations and suggestions contained in the CRGP.

One aspect of the working groups was a constant – the regional representation of business owners, community leaders, and interested citizens. One example of how well the regional concept continues to work is illustrated by the region's economic development professionals. This was one of the first stakeholder groups convened by the BRAC RTF. The early inclusion of economic development professionals has proven to be a positive factor in the Fort Bragg region, as they have brought unprecedented collaboration and a strong sense of regionalism.

More than other stakeholder groups, the economic developers have demonstrated an understanding of the importance of a high quality of life for the potential success of the region, and that quality of life comes from many interlinked elements, including school quality, transportation, amenities, workforce development, infrastructure, and environment.

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Since 2006, the economic development directors from the 11 counties of the Fort Bragg region have worked jointly, establishing a Regional Working Group that meets quarterly. BRAC RTF hired an economic development consulting firm to work directly with this group to ensure the region “speaks with one voice” when meeting with prospective developers, defense firms, and other businesses seeking to relocate or expand in the region as a result of mission growth.

In support of the regional planning effort to engage the agricultural community, the BRAC RTF received a \$200,000 grant from the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission to establish a Regional Agricultural

Sustainability Program, established in 2007. The goal of this program is to transform agriculture in southeastern North Carolina by linking the agricultural community to the opportunities emanating from the population growth related to BRAC 2005 affecting Fort Bragg and Pope AFB. This initiative is intended to guide the region toward sustainable growth and development, and will ensure that agriculture is fully integrated into the regional plan for sustainability.

Along the same lines, a \$400,000 grant from the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund will establish a regional Working Lands Protection Strategy in the 11-county BRAC region. The continued viability of the region's working lands will help maintain the operational readiness of Fort Bragg. The installation can continue to perform its mission, lessening the problems posed by suburban encroachments and other land uses that are



North Carolina's port system operates international deepwater ports at Wilmington and Morehead City within 700 miles of more than 70 percent of the U.S. industrial base. Two inland terminals at Greensboro and Charlotte make shipping across the Atlantic direct and highly economical.

incompatible with the Army's training and operational objectives. The Working Lands Protection Strategy will build upon the ongoing efforts of the Regional Agricultural Sustainability Program.

ADDRESSING WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION NEEDS

Relocating two major Army commands to Fort Bragg and an Air Force Reserve Wing to Pope AFB will place significant demands on the local civilian workforce. A total of 19,200 jobs will be created by 2013 as a result of additional military investment in the region.

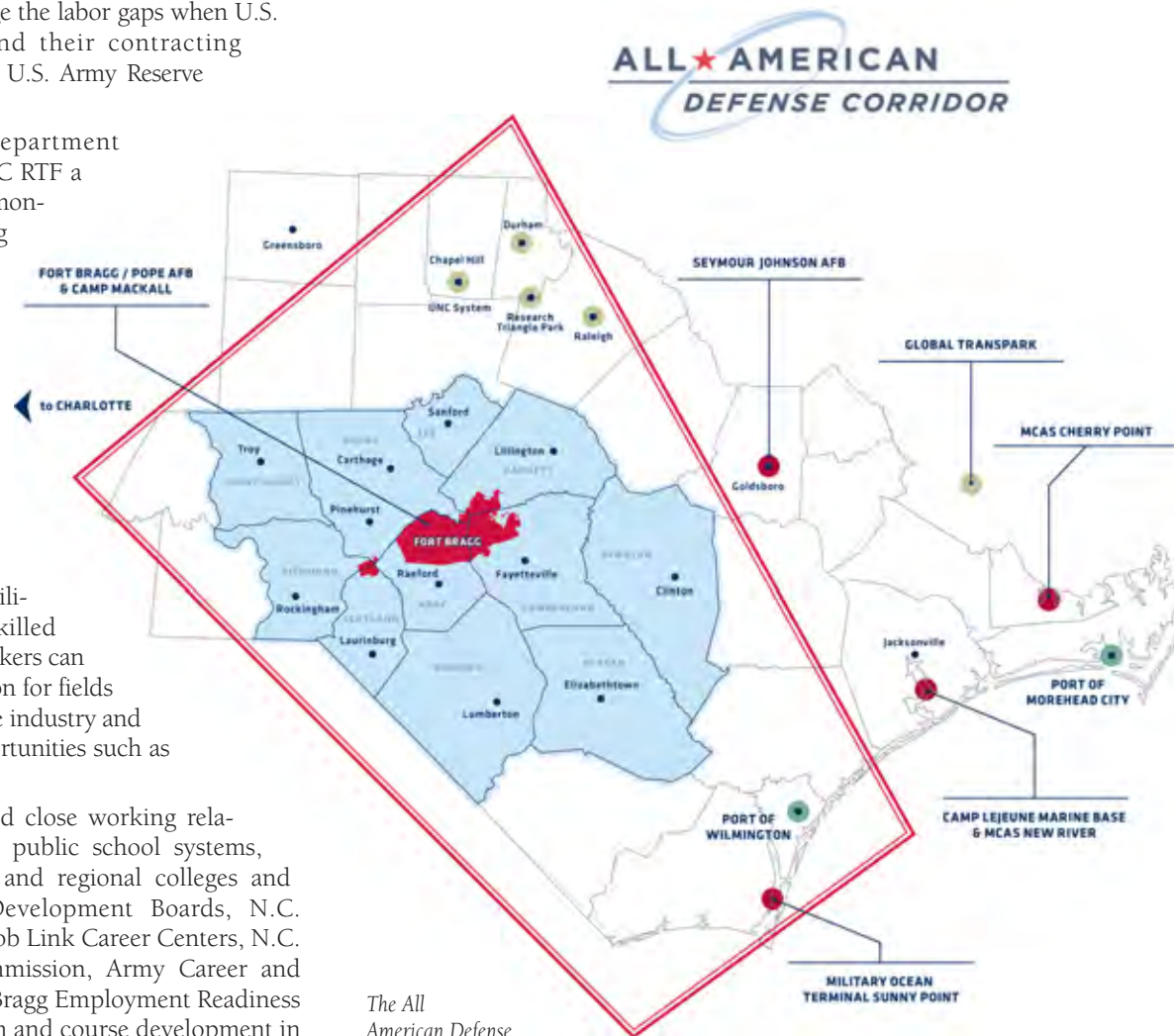
In the past 10 years, the Fort Bragg region has lost over 16,000 jobs due to a decline in traditional industries such as textiles, manufacturing, and tobacco farming. Fort Bragg has more than 5,000 soldiers each year who retire or leave the military and take with them valuable professional skills, abilities, and a work ethic in high demand by businesses across the country. The BRAC RTF recognized a need to educate, retrain, and develop the existing workforce and give these highly talented soldiers a reason to stay in the region to bridge the labor gaps when U.S. Army Forces Command and their contracting civilian counterparts, and U.S. Army Reserve Command relocate.

In July 2007, the U. S. Department of Labor awarded the BRAC RTF a \$5 million workforce demonstration grant. This funding will be used to plan for regional workforce transformation and ensure that workers are prepared for high tech jobs supporting national military preparedness and homeland security. This program will ensure that transitioning military, military spouses, a lower skilled workforce, and other job seekers can receive training and education for fields such as the emerging defense industry and other key employment opportunities such as healthcare and education.

BRAC RTF has developed close working relationships with the region's public school systems, community colleges, local and regional colleges and universities, Workforce Development Boards, N.C. Department of Commerce Job Link Career Centers, N.C. Employment Security Commission, Army Career and Alumni Program, and Fort Bragg Employment Readiness Program to assist in program and course development in support of the workforce retraining needs and furthering the education demands in the region.

Establishing the *All American Center for Workforce Innovation* last year is an excellent example of how the BRAC RTF is bringing regional education and workforce partners together toward a common goal: tying together the educational assets to support future workforce and career development needs in the 11 counties. The Center, located at Fayetteville Technical Community College, connects local businesses and educators who have a common interest in using modeling and simulation technology with training and classroom instruction assets. Interactive 3-D technology experts at Fayetteville Tech work with the military, businesses and educators to develop custom, interactive 3-D imaging (i3D) of equipment, processes and classroom applications which become part of a 3-D image repository.

The All American Center for Workforce Innovation has taken a step forward to bring this technology to all of the community colleges in the region. The BRAC RTF purchased portable i3D theaters for each of the community



The All American Defense Corridor encompasses six major military installations which give a financial boost to support cities, towns and communities, inspire new technologies, and create an exceptional business opportunity for the region.

Counties within the Corridor have outstanding resources in higher education, research and development, innovative military technologies, and a trained and ready workforce to meet the business demands of defense contracting firms. For example, in the heart of the Corridor, Fayetteville State University and the University of North Carolina at Pembroke have established a regional electron microprobe – the latest generation of a scanning electron microscope (SEM) facility in southeastern North Carolina to house the world's most advanced technology in an effort to build research infrastructure for metallurgy, mineralogy, chemistry, and biology.

colleges to enrich the classroom setting and provide students with the ability to manipulate images and further the learning process. The i3D database is shared among the community colleges and continuously updated. Taking it one step further, the BRAC RTF will place the same i3D technology in one pilot high school in each of the 11 BRAC counties – a \$200,000 grant from the Golden Leaf Foundation has made this connection to our regional high schools possible.

Another area of study under this U.S. Department of Labor grant is identifying and mapping the targeted emerging industries and associated labor demands that will transform the regional economy during this period of transition. The study will also identify the academic and vocational demands of targeted industry clusters. In the next three years, more than 6,400 government jobs will be created, bringing the total number of government-related jobs to 134,872. Construction-related sector jobs will grow by 6,267 and the professional and technical services sector will grow by 2,515. This study will result in much-needed data regarding in-demand

careers and will identify the most highly competitive occupations, and the skills and education required in the region by 2011.

In the coming months, the mapping study will fold into a larger project – one that will give the region's workforce access to comprehensive education, training and employment tools that will also connect the Fort Bragg transition office and career centers, regional businesses, higher education partners, 11-county school systems, workforce development boards, NC Department of Commerce, and many other state and local partners. The interactive Regional Career Exploration and Talent Acquisition Platform will be the first of its kind in the country.

This online system will have a regional focus for employment, education, and career exploration. Users may conduct a skills assessment; explore high-demand, wage and skill occupations and careers; and find college classes to shore up educational requirements or to complete a certification or degree program.

AN ALL AMERICAN CONCEPT AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

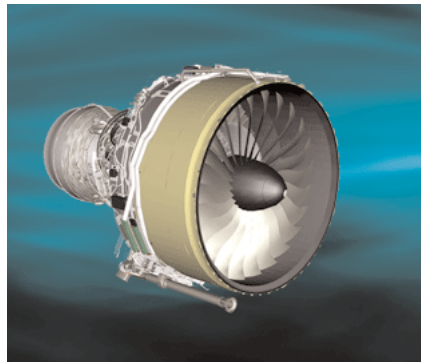
Taking a regional approach to BRAC 2005 resulted in an opportunity for the BRAC RTF to link Fort Bragg and

Pope AFB with the strengths that already exist in North Carolina. These strengths include world class research and development, skilled and trained workforce, excellent transportation system, top-notch college and R&D capacity, and an exceptional quality of life – all of which will attract defense companies and transform the region's economy many times over in the next ten years.

Uniting these important assets for the state is key with the relocation of the U.S. Army Forces Command and U.S. Army Reserve Command. Establishing these commands at Fort Bragg will serve as the catalyst for defense industry growth in southeastern North

Carolina. With this in mind, the BRAC RTF formed the All American Defense Corridor stretching over the 11 BRAC counties and encompassing the Raleigh-Durham and the Research Triangle region to the north and Wilmington and its major port system in the south.

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Fayetteville Technical Community College and a consortium of world-renowned technology partners have established the nation's first interactive 3D center offering modeling and simulation training and development for military and civilian applications.

effort to build research infrastructure for metallurgy, mineralogy, chemistry, and biology. Nearby, the Defense Security and Technology Accelerator is an innovative incubation program that assists entrepreneurs with the rapid development of dual-use defense and security technology solutions. The Army Research Office is a critical facility in the Corridor, which focuses on far-reaching technological discoveries in educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and private industry.

Considering the economic impact created by BRAC 2005 and the anticipated demand of the defense sector, the region stands to benefit in many ways. Over \$2 billion in military construction on Fort Bragg will bring more than 6,000 economic migrants to the region who

will contribute to a steady and growing economy. Fort Bragg will hire over 6,000 civilians to staff workforce needs. By 2013, total demand under the Fort Bragg expansion is expected to grow by \$1.69 billion with components of personal income increasing by \$1.47 billion and disposable income growing by \$1.27 billion.

LESSONS LEARNED

Pulling together a regional approach to mandated BRAC actions and making it work did not happen overnight. The city and county leaders within the 11 counties knew the outcomes of BRAC 2005 would bring many questions and challenging situations to the table. It has been very important to work hand-in-hand with each county and municipality, making sure their needs were identified and giving them tools to work through the opportunities and challenges. Keeping board members included and involved in all aspects of our work has been and will continue to be imperative. Involving the military leadership has been an important piece of this process and making sure they understand our organization is working in their best interest takes time and effort. Establishing close working relationships with state and federal agencies and working through issues such as transportation, education, project funding and other matters on a regional basis has been very productive. Representing the Fort Bragg region with one voice will continue in the future. ☎

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