

Maneuver Center takes shape

By Vince Little

The Bayonet

December 10, 2010

<http://www.army.mil/-news/2010/12/10/49276-maneuver-center-takes-shape/>

FORT BENNING, Ga. (Dec. 10, 2010) - Army efforts to assemble the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning took a giant step forward this year, but hurdles remain before the organization becomes fully operational next September, the deputy garrison commander for transformation said Tuesday at the monthly MCoE community update.

Col. Frederick Wolf discussed the Base Realignment and Closure pieces that fell into place and outlined the road ahead during a 90-minute presentation inside the National Infantry Museum.

"A lot of people doubted whether the Maneuver Center would ever happen, but you see growth in just about every area of Fort Benning," he said. "Amazing progress has been made in 2010. The only way to get to that level was a lot of teamwork across the Army. It was not easy. There have been a lot of challenges along the way.

"Numerous agencies had to come together ... with a plan to allow this construction to progress on schedule."

During a seven-year period ending in 2014, the post will complete \$3.5 billion in construction, most of it tied to creating the MCoE and linking Fort Benning's Infantry School with the Armor School from Fort Knox, Ky.

Advance parties began moving into new facilities at Harmony Church last summer to pave the way for future waves of Armor and Cavalry Soldiers.

With less than 280 days remaining to meet BRAC objectives, Wolf said a surge in Fort Knox families should begin arriving here in March and continue through August as the main bodies from the 194th Armored Brigade and 316th Cavalry Brigade make the move.

Wolf said officials face "extremely tight timelines" moving into the new year with ongoing projects.

The new seven-lane Access Control Point in Harmony Church off U.S. Highway 27/280 should open early next month, he said.

The new MCoE headquarters will be ready for occupation in May. The \$172 million renovation is the largest under way in the Army. That same month, the Directorate of Logistics will move into a new warehouse on Kelley Hill, which should divert truck traffic away from its present spot on Main Post.

Wolf said 140 miles of roads and trails are being built in six training areas around Fort Benning. A bridge

Maneuver Center takes shape

over U.S. Highway 27/280 is under construction that will give tanks, Bradleys and heavy equipment transports access to ranges. Two other vehicle bridges across 27/280 have been completed.

In all, \$1.2 billion in equipment will be shipped here from Fort Knox, he said.

This past summer, work resumed on the new \$333.4 million hospital to replace the Martin Army Community Hospital following a legal battle over two conflict-of-interest protests. A federal judge ultimately ordered the Savannah District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to reinstate the original contract to Turner Construction Company Inc. of Huntsville, Ala.

Wolf said construction should be finished in 2014, with the new hospital opening the following year.

On Main Post, engineers are reviewing proposals for an 860-room Army Lodge and plan to award a contract within the next couple of months, he said. The 18-month project is targeted for completion in mid-2012.

Fort Benning currently supports more than 120,000 Soldiers, family members, civilians and retirees on a daily basis. Based on projections, about 144,000 Soldiers will train here annually starting next year.

"This is something the Army has looked at doing for a long time - getting to the point where we can train Armor and Infantry Soldiers together. Now, you're seeing it come to fruition," Wolf said. "It's more than the brick and mortar. The Armor and Infantry will gain a great deal of synergy with the transformation of Fort Benning. Soldiers who fight side by side in combat will now start training together at a very early stage."

BRAC planners reached several milestones in 2010. They included:

The MCoE received its first Armor School Soldier Jan. 13 with the arrival of Col. Michael Wadsworth, the assistant commandant. New leadership took shape as Maj. Gen. Robert Brown became the MCoE's second commanding general in November. The command team includes Brig. Gen. Bryan Owens, the Infantry School commandant, and Col. Ted Martin, the Armor School's commandant.

Eleven artifacts rolled in March 2 on a heavy equipment transport convoy as part of the first shipment by the Patton Museum of Cavalry and Armor. A new museum is planned near the National Infantry Museum.

In early spring, two new battalion training facilities opened on Sand Hill, housing 1,200 Soldiers each. The headquarters complexes feature a large dining facility, state-of-the-art classrooms, training spaces and barracks. When construction is completed, Sand Hill will have the capacity for 12 battalions conducting basic combat or Infantry one station unit training.

Maneuver Center takes shape

Three child development centers were completed in preparation for the influx of new families.

The 197th Infantry Brigade moved its headquarters to Harmony Church. The Directorate of Training Sustainment, a new organization, was also stood up in the area.

Work was finished on 1,439 new housing units under the Residential Communities Initiative, a \$450 million program. Wolf said the focus has shifted to renovation efforts. In the end, there will be 4,000 new or renovated homes on Fort Benning, on-post housing accommodates only 25 percent of the Soldiers and families assigned here.

The first Armor School tanks reached Fort Benning soil in the summer. Five M1A2 Abrams System Enhancement Package tanks, the first of 188 being transferred from Fort Knox, arrived Aug. 11 at the Ochille Rail Head.

The Digital Multi-Purpose Range Complex became operational. Bradley fighting vehicle and tank crews from the MCoE fired on the range in late September as part of a validation test.

The Armor School's first Bradleys made it to Harmony Church earlier this fall. Three M2A2 Operation Desert Storm Bradley fighting vehicles came in Oct. 22 at the new Vehicle Maintenance Instruction Facility, which opened in July. The building will be home to the first Armor School course at Fort Benning. The M2/M3 Bradley Fighting Vehicle System Maintainer class - advanced individual training for Bradley maintainers - kicks off Jan. 10.

A site that was pine forest and dirt in 2009 materialized into the 194th Armored Brigade Barracks Complex this year. Fourteen buildings can house 3,360 Soldiers in training, and a walking bridge that opened over U.S. Highway 27/280 will allow easy access to training venues. About 200 MCoE instructors and cadre are living in nearby permanent party barracks, and that number is expected to reach 600 in 2011.

Where to get updates

The monthly MCoE community update is open to the public and takes place at 3 p.m. the first Tuesday of every month in the National Infantry Museum. The next session is Jan. 4.