

Leaders Plumb Plans for 5th BCT Arrival



By Frenchi Jones

Staff writer

fjones@coastalcourier.com

Updated: April 3, 2009 9:47 a.m.

More than 200 of the Army's top leaders met at Fort Stewart on Wednesday to rehearse a concept drill and further discuss plans for the 5th Brigade Combat Team's arrival. The team, made up of 3,500 soldiers, is expected to begin trickling into the area as early as April 2010, bringing nearly 6,000 family members and civilian supporters to Fort Stewart and the surrounding areas. Construction already has begun at the post in preparation for the team's arrival, which will be at 70 percent full strength by October 2010. According to Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo, Wednesday's drill was organized by leaders of the 3rd Infantry Division to help military and local officials work through any planning issues or concerns. "Today we had, in the room, the three-star [general] in charge of the Army budget, we had the three-star in charge of equipment, we had the three-star in charge of Army operations, we had the deputy commanding general of Forces Command," Cucolo said, "So, what happened was, all of these significant leaders ... who make decisions about timing and resources so that plans for growth can be successful, were going over the plan for Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield." "We went over everything that is going to happen, for every year, from now through fiscal year 2015," he said after the drill. During the drill, Cucolo said, officials raised questions such as whether the necessary facilities to support the brigade at the post would be built on time, whether the road that would support the location of the new brigade would be built on time and whether the post has enough emergency and recreational facilities to support the influx of soldiers and family members. Cucolo said that by the end of the drill, he and the other leaders present had made "solid decisions" on some of the questionable planning issues and had left others for further discussion. "There's always uncertainty in these sorts of things and for those things that are uncertain, there is a commitment to take that issue ... [to the highest levels of the Army]," he said. Among those projects left up in the air are the plans for a \$35 million bypass that would run north of Highway 144, stretching from Glennville to Richmond Hill. The bypass would bring traffic flow to the west side of the fort and officials hoped it would alleviate traffic congestion. Cucolo said expenses for the project and the security staff needed for new checkpoints might be a problem.



“We are still looking for that money right now,” he said. “We’re looking to both state and federal officials to help us get that done.” Other issues of concern regarding the arrival of the 5th BCT are things such as housing and adequate medical support for the soldiers and their families. Currently, Fort Stewart is able to house only 20 percent of the 5th BCT. Leaders said they are relying heavily on local development authorities to come up with the other 80 percent of the soldiers’ housing needs. Cucolo said he is confident that by the time the entire brigade arrives, the soldiers and their families will have everything they need. “We will be ready,” he said. In three separate flights to Hunter Army Airfield, nearly 600 of the Oregon soldiers arrived to Fort Stewart on Monday. The arrivals brought in the last of Lt. Col. William Prendergast’s squadron. “The entire task force ended tonight, so we’re really going to be able to hit it hard ... and get ready for combat,” he said. “We’ve been training for almost a month and we’re ready to start our collective training, which is key to our deployment. It’s great to be Title 10 (being on active duty status) and to get started on the path that we are getting ready to take.” For the next week, Prendergast said his soldiers will fill out paperwork, get acquainted with the area and work out any kinks that could possibly hinder performance. “If we get the next seven days right, everything else will run smoothly,” Prendergast said. During the next 60-days, members of the 41st will be trained by the 188th on combat-related training exercise, including driver’s training, rollover training and training at all the ranges.