

More troops coming?

Mayor: Two originally planned brigades could be headed here

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Monday, Hinesville Mayor Jim Thomas said this area is in for population growth no matter what happens with the so-called 5th brigade combat team.

"Fort Stewart is going to get people, lots and lots of people," he said to members of the Hinesville Military Affairs Committee.

While discussing a lobbying trip to Washington, D.C., last week, Thomas told the HMAC that the area could see more soldiers than the

3,500 originally scheduled to start arriving by April 2010.

That increase in manpower here came into question after the recent release of the Pentagon's budget request, which implied the Department of Defense does not want as many brigades as originally planned.

"There are units coming out of Germany going to Fort Bliss and then there are two more brigades coming out of Germany that the Army has to make a decision on,"

the mayor said. "There is a possibility that one of those brigades could be headed here."

Members of the 172nd Infantry Brigade, based in Schweinfurt and Grafenwöhr and the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, based in Baumholder have been slated to be assigned to Fort Bliss, Texas.

However, in December, the Army

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announced that plans to relocate the brigades would be delayed, with the first unit possibly arriving in fiscal year 2012.

Thomas said overcrowding at Fort Bliss could pose a problem with the placements, which would leave only Fort Carson, Colo., and Fort Stewart as the options for the other two brigades.

"Fort Bliss right now is trying to take those people from Germany that were previously designated and I don't think they can take another brigade as easily as Fort Stewart," the mayor said.

"The only place you could place that brigade and get it ready [for deployment] is Fort Stewart, Georgia," he said.

In addition, Thomas pointed out that the visit to Washington rendered several implications that Fort Stewart could also still see a large number of soldiers from what would have been a 5th BCT.

"Basically, the secretary of defense made these decisions ... and then there was a large hullabaloo because

the Army generals needed those brigades," he said. "So, no matter, what, we're going to get something.

"The only thing that I have told them is that if the brigades come, we need more time so that the city can absorb these folks."

Fort Stewart officials would not comment on the issue, but Army spokesman, Lt. Col. Lee Packnett, said there is no official word as to whether there will be a 5th BCT or whether the two Germany-based brigades will be stationed at Fort Stewart.

"In February, the United States Army-Europe commander recommended the brigades stay [in Germany] longer than their scheduled time," Packnett said in a telephone interview Tuesday. "Other than that, there is no new information out there yet, because the budget has not been briefed yet as to what will happen."

Thomas said he is expecting an official decision to be made sometime in early May.

"It just depends on the president. The president has got to make that decision."