

HONORABLE JOHN McHUGH

SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

FORT STEWART

February 11, 2014

Speaker: Welcome. It is good to see everybody again. Today we are honored and actually thrilled to have Secretary McHugh to join us for a visit to Fort Stewart. I had the opportunity to get the Secretary out to see some Soldiers today. We put him in the helicopter and flew him around with the doors open and made sure he experienced a little bit of the cold Savannah weather. I think he was expecting it to be a little warmer. It is a great honor and a great privilege to have the senior leader in our Army that does stuff for our Soldiers, for our families, and for our Army each and every day. Given the challenges that he faces each and every day in the Pentagon, I am sure he will tell you he is thrilled to get down here and spend some time with you. I have personally seen the commitment that the Secretary has to our Army, our Soldiers, and our families. It is incredibly impressive, and we are humbled and thrilled, Mr. Secretary, to have you with us today. Thank you for the visit. We appreciate it, Sir.

Secretary McHugh: Thank you so much. I had the opportunity to serve in the Pentagon with General Murray, and he is a great leader. We paroled him to do what great leaders in this Army, most of all, want to do, and that is to lead Soldiers. I was anxious to come down here today to have the chance, and this is my second visit to this region over the air field here at Fort Stewart to catch up on the progress and great challenges and efforts that Division has been making. This is an Army in a time of great transition. We are coming out of our last, hopefully for some time, final theater of war. The budgetary changes and challenges that we are facing are significant.

We are an Army that needs to think about itself in different ways and needs to plod ahead to the future that is clouded and is uncertain. There are certain things we are certain of. That is the men and women who put on this uniform and the amazing things they do. I am certainly very, very gratified to see some of those great Soldiers doing their great work today. I was out visiting with the great Eagle Company, the Company that will deploy to Afghanistan in June and out on the ranges with our great helicopter war fighters watching them hone their skills. We completed sitting down with the Sergeants Major and the leadership of this great facility and talking about a variety of challenges we face with most, particularly with sexual assault and sexual harassment. I was uplifted from the moment I stepped out of the vehicles here this morning to right through the lunch here today to have the opportunity to hear from, watch, and observe great Soldiers doing what great Soldiers have always done, and that is the important work of keeping us free and keeping us strong. So it is always a great pleasure to get back with General Murray. I also give a tip of the hat to Mr. Gath, my CASA Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army. He does a great job bringing the Army message between the post and the community. So Dale, thanks for all that you do as well.

I appreciate the opportunity to be with you. I would be happy to try to respond to any questions you might have.

Participant: Two years ago when you were here, you were talking about the possibility of balancing things. We now know the Second Brigade is here. Initially the time table was somewhere between then and 2017. We now know it is 2015, next year. What went into that decision? Why so quick?

Secretary McHugh: The Army, compared to the other services, is somewhat unique. If the Navy is challenged fiscally, I am not suggesting they do this, but by way of example, they can lay up an aircraft carrier and save billions of dollars. The Army is, as the Army has always been, made up of people. When our budgets are cut so quickly and so significantly as we have seen through sequestration and such, although we do have thankfully some relief from Congress in FY14 and FY15, but

we had sequestration in FY13 and the law of the land says we will go back into it under the current way forward. In 2016, the only place where we can really find that money is through our end-strength. The other thing is as we begin to downsize, we found that given the decrease in operations and personnel tempo that we could actually effectively, without too much risk, bring down that end-strength. So we moved the target from 2017 to 2015. That will allow us to meet our budget challenge. It will allow us to make the best decisions in terms of which personnel we keep. It will posture us more effectively to continue to work through whatever the budget profile may look like as Congress goes forward.

Participant: I have heard that there may be some downsizing of civilian employees also.

Secretary McHugh: We were directed by the Department of Defense and Secretary Hagel to find 20% savings in headquarters. We felt because of how we had grown particularly in our civilian end-strength in the Army, we might be able at the headquarters level to do a bit more. So we targeted 25%. I cannot tell you I will defer to General Murray and others here, but I think you locally, if you see any effects they will be relatively minimal. The civilian workforce is often overlooked and under-appreciated. I will tell you they, too, have been through the last 12 years of struggle. They have done amazing things quietly, professionally. Lately their reward has been furloughs and pay freezes and three years of no cost of living adjustments. That is not a lot of appreciation for a work force that is absolutely critical to everything we do. So we are trying to be very mindful of any decisions we make and the impact that it will have upon them. They are an irreplaceable and important part of this team. We appreciate all the sacrifices that they have made too.

Participant: As we move into downsizing (inaudible), how is that issue going to work to minimize the effects of it?

Secretary McHugh: This drawdown, as difficult as it was, was done in a way I think that probably minimized the negative impacts of downsizing in the past.

Particularly the reinvesting of harvested Brigades, the Battalions being reseeded into the Forces that remain. Thus, the math may be a little bit off here, but the net loss of Soldiers leaving Fort Stewart is about 1,900. That is about half of what a Brigade looks like. The other thing with the addition of the Fires Brigade units, I think we have better postured ourselves for the future. The mission for every post, camp, and station is to make sure we have the best possible Army going forward. The lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan taught us very clearly that the three-Battalion Brigade was far more versatile, far more effective, and so I think the remaining Brigades here as they will be across the Army will be far more useful tools going into the future.

The other thing I think is important for everyone to understand is that Fort Stewart was not singled out. Every multi-Brigade post in CONUS lost a Brigade as well. We tried to be as equitable as we possibly could. I think given the challenges we face, we are fairly successful. Downsizing is never easy. This is something that every post-war period has brought. As we discussed in my previous visit a couple of years ago, we saw this coming. Nevertheless, when you go through it, it is a challenge. What I worry about is how far are we going to have to come down beyond this point. I think it is pretty clear the end-strength will continue to decrease somewhat. The concern I and the Chief of Staff have with Bill Murray and other leaders is if you look at full sequestration, as currently planned, and as is currently the law through 2023, our end-strength will probably have to come down to 420,000 from the 490,000 or so that we are working toward right now. So there is a lot of rough territory ahead. I have confidence that we can meet those challenges if we are given the time and the opportunity to plan for them appropriately.

Participant: (Inaudible). What is it that impresses you as you go through this facility here?

Secretary McHugh: It is always Soldiers. No matter where I go, whether it is into Afghanistan or any camp, post, or station as someone who spends the vast majority of my time around a briefing table in the Pentagon, the true joy and uplifting experience to come out here and see young Soldiers doing incredibly complex things. At the great Eagle facility I visited, I was talking to a young man who had been an engineer and repairing these things for about a year. I asked him what he was doing before the past year when he learned this skill. He said he was driving a tractor. It is amazing to me to see Soldiers of such a young age take on these complex challenges and do them expertly. The thing about this facility, and one of the things I think makes it unique is its high deployability. We spent some time in the leaders' briefing talking to the civil works folks, the Corp of Engineers folks, about the widening and deepening of the project. While that will not immediately affect the deployability to make it any more plausible, the fact that the port is here now and available as part of a deployment mission is a very important one. It has all the tools necessary to get forward, to go wherever the challenge may need it. That is always a unique capability. As much as anything it is what stands this facility apart.

Participant: (Inaudible) The families are equally important. How do you feel that this is going to affect them? Is it going to disrupt them as much that they will have to be relocated, or do you see this as the Army homesteading them even though the unit will be downsizing?

Secretary McHugh: We say repeatedly the phrase Army family. It is more to us than just a bumper sticker. Truly if you look at the profile of this force compared to a quarter century ago, it is a highly family-oriented organization. We have particularly focused on the health and welfare and well being of Soldiers' families over the last 12 years. At the time we took our family programs budget and almost doubled it from \$600 million to \$1.2 billion. As funding comes down, and as our end strength comes down, the money we spend on those programs will be reduced as well. I made it a priority to ensure that we make decisions that recognize fully the importance of maintaining critical family programs. We want to do that. As to

disrupting people's lives, I mentioned half of the Division or half of a Brigade roughly will be staying here reinvested. Those will be Soldiers who are currently serving. So they should not have to go through an unexpected change of station. There will be some of that. We are trying to minimize it. We are trying to keep units together as best we can. Part of being in the United States Army and the United States military is PCSing, permanent change of station. It was always part of the life that made me wonder how people could do it. I hate to move. Yet it is hard to talk to a teenager in an Army family who has not been in 4 or 5 different schools. While they are very good at it, we want to provide them as much stability as we can. Now that we are out of theater and deployments will decline significantly. As you are seeing here already, we hope to bring increased stability to the station. That is something we are working very hard.

End of Remarks.