

## Army secretary observes training, expansion from above at Fort Benning

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FORT BENNING, Ga. — The Army's top civilian leader praised the "huge muscle movement" taking place to produce the Maneuver Center of Excellence while making his first official visit June 2 to Fort Benning.

John McHugh, who became the 21st Army secretary in September, got an aerial overview of the massive expansion under way for the Maneuver Center of Excellence and met some basic training Soldiers during the daylong stopover. He praised the expertise and skills post leaders have pumped into troops fighting the war on terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq over the past decade.

"I came away with a great sense of how it is that we field such terrific Soldiers. The training that's occurring here (and) the leadership is just exemplary," he said. "If it weren't for places like Fort Benning, the United States Army could never be what it is — and that is the greatest fighting force the world has ever known."

As part of the MCoE transformation, Fort Benning will produce 52 percent of all new Soldiers. McHugh spoke with a few Wednesday who are wrapping up basic combat training and got to observe them engaged in combatives on a large scale.

"I was amazed these folks were in their 10th or 12th week — they looked like seasoned Soldiers and looked like they could go out and instruct those techniques themselves," he said. "That's just a great tribute to the cadre here and the quality of training they're giving them. But it also speaks pretty highly to the quality of troops we're recruiting."

The secretary also spent a half-hour with about 15 wounded Soldiers at the Warrior Transition Battalion. He said he tries to do that at every installation he visits.

Warrior transition efforts have improved and expanded across the Army and its surrounding communities, McHugh said.

"It's not a perfect program, (but) it's one that we try to take lessons learned and make adjustments to each and every day," he said. "By and large what I heard was that medical care being provided is top quality."

"It's a very important opportunity for me and the rest of the Army leadership to make sure that our good intentions in how these programs are designed on paper back in the Pentagon and then brought to the various medical commands ... are working the way we want them to. And these kind of sessions provide us with that chance."

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McHugh discussed the ongoing unification of the Infantry and Armor centers here, saying it will have a profound impact on Army operations and training.

“That’s the way we fight,” he said. “We have different types of fighting forces ... but when they’re forward-deployed downrange on the battlefield, that’s one Army, and you’ve got to be able to work together. It’s a whole heckuva lot easier to ensure that happens in theater when you have the chance to train on a regular basis together.”

On a helicopter tour, McHugh received a progress report while reviewing the \$3.5 billion in construction on Base Realignment and Closure projects tied to next year’s arrival of the Armor School from Fort Knox, Ky. He was told everything’s on schedule to meet deadlines within BRAC initiatives as the MCoE is set to become fully operational by September 2011.

“That’s an extraordinary amount of money to spend over the next three to five years, but they’ve got a plan,” he said. “We feel very good about this. This is a huge muscle movement. It’s going to produce ... a Maneuver Center of Excellence, and it will certainly have the facilities that the name suggests should be here.

“(It’s) an enormous undertaking. To bring Armor to a place that is already the training focus for Infantry puts all the moving parts together. And we think the end result is going to be something that is incredibly beneficial to Soldiers and the experiences they’ll have eventually out in the battlefield. They’ll be able to train the way they’re going to fight.”