



May 8, 2014

From Brig. Gen. William B. Hickman

Commander of the JRTC and Fort Polk

To community members throughout the great State of Louisiana:

I have always been proud to say I am a member of America's Army. Since December of 2012 when I took command of the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, I've also been proud to say I am a member of America's Army serving in Louisiana.

Over and over again, Louisiana demonstrates a real commitment to our Soldiers, Families, civilian employees and retirees. That kind of support is unprecedented among military installations – and I've been to many. I want to thank all of you, from our elected leaders throughout the state, to the local business owner who displays a welcome home sign to our troops, to the family that ties a yellow ribbon around the tree in the front yard. Thank you, all of you.

Fort Polk is thriving in many areas today and the Army continues to pour millions of dollars into the installation, due in large part to support from our national leaders and Louisiana state and local community leaders. But our relationship involves much more than mutual support. It's a symbiotic relationship where the waxing and waning of one entity impacts the others economically, socially and developmentally. The relationship we enjoy, the relationship our communities thrive on, depends on honest and open communication. That's what you're going to get from Fort Polk. That's our standard.

In recent weeks there has been much media attention focused on the Army's Land Purchase Program and the need to increase JRTC's training area by 47,500 acres south and southeast of Peason Ridge. Our installation newspaper, the Guardian, published an article presenting some of the facts in the May 2 edition. That article was also released to newspapers state wide to help dispel myths and rumors. We're going to keep on putting information out so we can keep you informed about the process. You deserve no less.

In 1993, Louisiana welcomed the Joint Readiness Training Center from Fort Chaffee, Arkansas to Fort Polk. Since then, the JRTC has become the Army's premier training center. That's a huge responsibility for all of us – a responsibility where the major focus is on training our Soldiers and units to accomplish tough missions wherever they are deployed.

Consider our Soldiers today. The 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division and our Explosive Ordnance Company recently redeployed from Afghanistan. We are extremely proud of their accomplishments. We are deploying elements of our Engineer Battalion and Military Police to Afghanistan this spring and we have Fort Polk Soldiers serving in the Horn of Africa and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. We also have Soldiers from our 162nd Infantry Brigade deployed to Afghanistan. These are quality forces that Fort Polk has provided to our nation – the same kind of quality forces that answered the nation’s call in the 1990s and 2000s.

But we are no longer the Army – and the JRTC -- of 1990 or 2005. In 2014 and beyond, we are shaping an Army that can be successful in operating in ambiguous environments over large areas – against an opposing Army and society that has capabilities very close to ours.

We must provide a more complex, ever-evolving training experience for our leaders and units. In the 1990s, our average JRTC rotation (held 10 times per year) included 2,500 Soldiers. By 2006 with the war in Iraq escalating, that number reached 5,000. JRTC rotations are now increasing to 6,000 Soldiers and I expect the number to rise to 7,000 by September of this year.

We must train these units over larger areas with room to maneuver larger formations. The Soldier of 2014 and beyond must be exposed to more extensive, complex live fire training exercises. There is no doubt that the JRTC saves lives with our robust training scenarios. We train our best and brightest at the JRTC. They deserve the best training available before our Nation asks them to deploy in harm’s way.

As we work together to make the JRTC an even stronger and more robust training center, please also remember the Soldiers that have made the ultimate sacrifice. Their memory drives us to improve the JRTC training experience and prepare our Soldiers for the unknown.