

WELCOME GENERAL FERRITER, DISTINGUISHED OFFICERS,  
MILITARY MEN AND WOMEN, ELECTED OFFICIALS AND GUESTS

MONDAY AFTERNOON, I CONTACTED GARY JONES, WITH VALLEY PARTNERSHIP, TO CONFIRM AND INQUIRE ABOUT THE TOUR SCHEDULED FOR TODAY.

I SAID "HELLO, GARY, IS THE TOUR STILL ON?" HE SAID; "YES." I SAID, "CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE GROUP AND THE SIZE." IT WAS AT THAT TIME, HE SAID THAT 90 OF THE MOST DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY FROM FORT BENNING WERE COMING AND HE SAID: "I WOULD LIKE FOR THE MAYOR, CHAIR, AND YOU TO SAY A FEW WORDS."

WELL, I IMMEDIATELY DID WHAT ANY PERSON WHO LACKS IN PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE WOULD DO. I PICKED MYSELF UP OFF MY OFFICE FLOOR DUSTED OFF MY HIGH HEELS AND BEGAN TO PREPARE FOR YOUR ARRIVAL AND WELCOME TO THE RUSSELL COUNTY COURTHOUSE.

I WANT YOU TO KNOW HOW HUMBLLED AND HONORED THAT I AM TO TALK WITH YOU TODAY.

MY FIRST THOUGHT OF THE MESSAGE I WANT TO SAY TO EACH OF YOU TODAY IS HOW IMPORTANT FORT BENNING, MILITARY PERSONNEL, YOUR WIVES AND HUSBANDS, CHILDREN AND MILITARY RETIREES ARE TO OUR COMMUNITY AND REGION.

WE ARE BLESSED TO HAVE THE COMMUNITY AND REGION THAT WE HAVE TODAY. I BEGAN THINKING OF HOW WE CAME TO BE HERE IN THIS MOMENT IN TIME; AND THOUGHT I WOULD REMIND US OF THE ROADS TRAVELED BEFORE TODAY.

RUSSELL COUNTY, ALABAMA HAS A LONG, LONG ASSOCIATION WITH THE MILITARY. THIS AREA IS, AND HAS BEEN, A STRATEGIC MILITARY AREA FOR FORTS SINCE BEFORE THE COUNTY WAS FORMED IN 1832. IN 1813, THERE WERE TWO FORTS IN FORT MITCHELL, ALABAMA, WHICH IS LOCATED AT THE WEST GATE OF FORT BENNING, ALABAMA.

IN 1813 FORT MITCHELL WAS BUILT AND ACTIVE. DUE TO THE FORTS ESTABLISHED AND THE MILITARY PRESENCE, RUSSELL COUNTY IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE "COUNTY OF FORTS." IF WE STOP AND THINK ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP THE MILITARY HAS WITH RUSSELL COUNTY; IT GOES BACK OVER 300 YEARS. RECORDS SHOW THAT RUSSELL COUNTY HAD A SPANISH FORT LOCATED HERE, DATED 1690. IN 1693 SAND FORT, AT FORT MITCHELL, WAS ESTABLISHED. THERE WAS A FORT GILLIAM ACTIVE DURING THE CIVIL WAR ERA. RUSSELL COUNTY WAS NAMED AFTER COL. GILBERT RUSSELL SR., COMMANDER OF THE, 3RD U.S. INFANTRY, WHO FOUGHT IN THE WAR OF 1812 AND THE CREEK WARS.

THEN IN 1921 SOME VERY SMART INDIVIDUALS PURCHASED THE LAND AND CREATED THE FORT BENNING MILITARY BASE THAT WAS ESTABLISHED IN ALABAMA AND GEORGIA.

PHENIX CITY AND RUSSELL COUNTY IN THE EARLY YEARS WAS CONSIDERED A MILL TOWN, WHERE EVERYONE LIVED, BUT MAINLY WORKED, IN COLUMBUS, GEORGIA IN THE MILLS. TODAY OUR COMMUNITY IS CHANGED. MORE ECONOMIC SERVICES ARE BASED HERE; SUPPORTING A VARIETY OF TRADES AND BUSINESSES IN OUR REGION.

BACK TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE TODAY WITH THE REGION AND FORT BENNING. THERE WAS A TIME THAT PHENIX CITY WELCOMED THE MILITARY FOR GAMBLING AND OTHER VICES IN THE 1950'S. IN FACT, FORT BENNING PLACED PHENIX CITY, RUSSELL COUNTY OFF LIMITS DURING THE 50'S AT ONE POINT. A SOLDIER HAD TO GET A MILITARY PASS TO VISIT HIS FAMILY OR COME OVER INTO THIS AREA.

AS WITH ANY RELATIONSHIP, YOU SURVIVE THE GROWING PAINS AND CHANGES. PHENIX CITY, RUSSELL COUNTY CLEANED UP THEIR TOWN AND HAS SPENT THE LAST 50 YEARS CREATING A PLACE THAT PEOPLE ARE PROUD TO CALL HOME.

THAT IS WHAT I WANT YOU TO LEAVE HERE KNOWING TODAY - THE MILITARY MEN AND WOMEN ARE A PART OF THE VERY FABRIC THAT HAS MADE PHENIX CITY, RUSSELL COUNTY WHAT IT IS TODAY.

RUSSELL COUNTY...WELL, THE STATE OF ALABAMA, IS KNOWN FOR ITS SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION IN THE MILITARY. ALABAMA HAS THE LARGEST, POPULATION AND MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF ANY STATE IN THE UNION.

WE ARE HERE IN THE MOMENT TO SAY TO YOU THAT YOU HAVE OUR FULL SUPPORT FOR FORT BENNING'S MILITARY INITIATIVES; AS A COMMUNITY, GOVERNMENT, CITIZENS AND HOPEFULLY, YOUR NEIGHBOR.

I AND OTHER OFFICIALS ARE INVOLVED WITH THE CIVILIAN MILITARY COUNCIL WHERE WE GATHER TO DISCUSS WAYS TO MEET THE GOALS AND NEEDS OF FORT BENNING AND AREA GOVERNMENTS.

RUSSELL COUNTY IS A PARTNER WITH VALLEY PARTNERSHIP, WORKING WITH GARY JONES. WE NOW HAVE A REGIONAL PLAN THAT IDENTIFIES AREAS OF GROWTH AND A NEEDS ASSESSMENT TO HELP US PLAN AND ALLOCATE RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE INITIATIVE AND OTHER GROWTH IN OUR AREA.

WE WANT EACH OF YOU TO KNOW THAT AS A PERSON AND AS MILITARY, YOU ARE VALUED, WELCOMED AND WE HOPE YOU WILL CALL RUSSELL COUNTY HOME.

LET'S CONTINUE TO BUILD OUR RELATIONSHIP AND IMPROVE UPON THE ALREADY EXCELLENT QUALITY OF LIFE IN THIS REGION. TOGETHER WE CAN IMPROVE ANYTHING...SCHOOLS, SPORTS, CHURCHS, GOVERNMENT...TOGETHER AS A TEAM.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME TODAY. I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU IN THE COMMUNITY.

-- RUSSELL COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR LEANN HORNE