

The Fayetteville Observer

HOME EDITION

VOL. CXCII-No. 251

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2009

www.fayobserver.com

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Soldiers, scholars to benefit

University system, USASOC sign collaboration agreement

By Drew Brooks

CHAPEL HILL— Students and faculty in the University of North Carolina system are used to seeing Carolina blue or Wolfpack red.

Now, Army camouflage is about to be added to the mix.

Officials with the university system and the Fort Bragg-based U.S. Army Special Operations Command formalized ties Thursday, signaling the start of what they hope will be a long relationship.

The agreement establishes a collaborative relationship that improves training for special operations soldiers while providing unique research opportunities for scholars.

Lt. Gen. John Mulholland Jr., commanding general of USASOC, and Erskine Bowles, UNC system president, approved the partnership by signing a memorandum of agreement in Chapel Hill.

UNC Board of Governors Chairwoman Hannah Gage said the agreement institutionalized the relationship, creating a framework that will transcend personnel changes.

“Chancellors and presidents and generals can come and go, but hopefully the Army’s needs will be cross-connected with the university’s services, and we’ll collaborate more and more,” she said. “The signing is the formality; the hope for what it symbolizes is enormous.”

Foreign language training

One area that will see an immediate impact is the teaching of foreign languages to USASOC soldiers.

Mulholland said special operations soldiers are required to attain basic-level understanding and speaking in one of several foreign languages. That training falls short of what one would expect from a university graduate, he said.

Soldiers who know a language but don’t understand cultural differences are “half dangerous,” Mulholland said.

By partnering with UNC, quality instructors can help improve language and cultural training, decreasing the risk of problems during negotiations with foreign nationals such as tribal leaders.

The agreement immediately affects the university system in other ways as well, including the creation of a baccalaureate degree in intelligence studies at Fayetteville State University, a new residency program to teach Army medic instructors at the UNC School of Medicine, and cooperation between USASOC and N.C. State University on creation of new combat uniforms.

Mulholland said the agreement was long overdue. “There is so much that we can benefit from here at the university,” he said. “To not take advantage of such areas of expertise would just be wrong.”

Bowles said the partnership benefits the state by directing defense funding to North Carolina and fostering ties with professionals, who would be encouraged to stay here after completing their military service.

Bowles said the military is responsible for about 400,000 jobs in the state and that the agreement will help protect a “growing and vital part of the economy.”

He said research and development personnel for special operations are already visiting campuses, searching for ways to mesh the Army’s goals with those of campus researchers.

Bowles said he envisioned future partnerships in logistics, nanotechnology, nutrition and field simulations.

“Think about the things we can do together,” he said. “This is just the beginning.”

Yearlong process

Retired Gen. James J. Lindsay, who was the first commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, helped broker the agreement through his role with the N.C. Military Foundation.

He said the agreement was about a year in the making.

“When I look back on this, I have to ask myself why didn’t we do this a long time ago,” Lindsay said.

The partnership will set the framework for similar agreements with military commands, he said, which will ultimately improve the state’s relationship with the military.

North Carolina has the fourth largest military presence in the U.S., but ranks 26th or 27th in terms of federal defense-related spending.

“This is just the beginning,” Lindsay said. “There are so many ways to connect with the military. This is the start of something significant.”