

D. Paul Sommerville, Vice Chairman
September 1, 2011
Marine Corps Air Station

Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of Beaufort County Council and Chairman Weston Newton - who sends his sincere regrets that he cannot be here today -- It is my pleasure to congratulate the Marine Corps Air Station and its leadership, Colonel Brian Murtha, Commanding Officer, Colonel Michael Cederholm, Commanding Officer of the Marine Air Group, Major General Jon Davis, and all the Marines and Sailors who strive to keep our nation out of harm's way. Please accept our gratitude for your service and your sacrifices.

Allow me to deviate a bit from my prepared text. I would like to give you all some history of this hallowed ground between the time when the Navy left in 1945 and the Marine Corp reopened the base in 1960.

I remember four specific things that occurred here. One there was a restaurant; a pretty good one as I recall. It was a 1950's style restaurant. There was also a basket factory at this site. The half-bushel baskets with the little handles on them were made commercially there. And there was also a tomato canning factory here. It was called Real Joy Canning and the name came from the owners initials. His name was J. Otis Youngblood and one of his daughters was named Joy.

The fourth businesses that was here was most significant to me because it was owned by my uncle, Gustav Benjamin Schurmeier, and the name of the business was Beaufort Packing Company. They manufactured watermelon pickles; or, to put it another way, watermelon-rind pickles. They purchased hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of perfectly good watermelons from all over the county - cut them open - scooped out the best part and scattered it all over what is now the air station and kept the rinds which they chopped up and turned into pickles. Which means for the last 50 or so years there are hundreds of millions of watermelon seeds lying dormant all around the air station waiting for Gabriel to blow his golden horn and summon them to action.

You pilots might want to be careful as you land because you may see something growing across the runway that looks very much like kudzu but is actually watermelon. You can imagine a conversation bet a pilot landing and the tower, "This is Red Rover on runway 270. Isn't that something like watermelons running across the runway?" "Yes, Red Rover, we've had an infestation of watermelons. You'll have to land on runway 170."

A couple of interesting facts: the watermelon rinds were packed in charred wooden whiskey barrels that they brought in by the trainloads and whenever a trainload of these whisky barrels arrived there was great competition among the hands to off-load the barrels because there was actually between a pint and a quart of good Tennessee sour mash whiskey in the keg. Apparently the barrels sat in position on the train

ride down and the whiskey would accumulate in the bottom of the barrel. And, Uncle Gustav had an eligible daughter named Betty Lu and anyone who wanted to court Betty Lu had to prove his mettle by cutting watermelon rinds into pickle parts.

The groundbreaking of the Joint Strike Fighter Hangar and Training Center at MCAS represents the beginning of a proud undertaking – one that honors the Marine Corps and the civilian community alike. The affection between the Marine Corps and the people of Beaufort County goes back to the time Marines first came here in 1891 to what is now the Parris Island Recruit Depot. They quickly captured the admiration of the local population through their valor and life-saving actions during tidal waves and hurricanes. The bond between civilian and military populations continued to strengthen during World War 1 and II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Iraq and Afghanistan. The community at-large wholeheartedly embraced the activation of the Naval Air Station Beaufort during World War II and the re-designation and re-activation of the facility in 1960 by the Marine Corps.

The Navy and the Marine Corps are woven into the fabric of our community. Many of our citizens are former Marines or Sailors or the sons and daughters, wives or husbands of Marines or Sailors. They can be found in leadership positions on County Council, the Board of Education and in many of our local businesses. This interweaving of the military and civilian communities has strengthened all of us and has resulted in many valuable partnerships down through the years.

For example, Beaufort County has worked jointly with the Department of Defense to ensure the operations of MCAS are protected from encroaching development. This was accomplished through shared acquisitions of eight parcels of land amounting to 782 vulnerable acres. Our Joint Land Use Study resulted in the Airport Overlay District Ordinance adopted in 2006 by County Council. Surrounding municipalities also adopted the ordinance which, as you all may know, helps protect flight operations at MCAS.

Additionally, County government joined together with former military officials during threats of base closures in mounting a campaign to educate our federal decision makers regarding the value of MCAS, Parris Island and the Naval Hospital to our region and our nation. We succeeded by not only keeping our local military facilities intact, but in obtaining some expanded resources.

Beaufort County is very proud of its status as a prototype of a military-friendly community as designated by the federal government because of our supportive policies. We delight in the likely possibility that the investment of the new hangar and training center is another successful result of our historic partnerships and the excellent relationships among Beaufort County, MCAS and the Department of Defense.

Beaufort County Council fully endorsed the placement of Joint Strike Fighter squadrons at MCAS through a unanimous council resolution, through monetary contributions in support of the public relations and communications campaign led by our Regional Chamber of Commerce and by enlisting the active support of our state and federal lawmakers.

It is expected that further upgrades to MCAS during the next few years will reach into the hundreds of millions of dollars. This will fortify the already dynamic economic engine that is MCAS-Beaufort and will greatly assist the Marine Corps in its mission.

Beaufort County Council sincerely welcomes all opportunities to support our national peacekeeping efforts. We applaud the successful project begun at MCAS in preparation for the F-35B, which is essential to the protection of freedom and democracy here in the United States and in Beaufort County.

Thank you.