

SPECIAL MEETING
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1982

Present: Chairman William J. Cossart, John E. Murray and Anne W. Donald.

The statutory requirement as to notice having been fulfilled, the meeting was called to order at 7:30p.m. by Chairman Cossart.

Fort Devens Sudbury Annex

Present: Congressman James Shannon, Aide David McGinn; Representative Lucile Hicks (arrived 7:40 p.m.); Major James Block and Colonel Delmar Corbin, Commander, both of Fort Devens; and approximately 16 residents.

At 7:30 p.m. Chairman Cossart convened a meeting with Congressman James Shannon and his aide, David McGinn; representatives of Fort Devens, Colonel Delmar Corbin (Commander of Fort Devens) and Major James Block; and area residents concerned with the change in the use of the Army property on Hudson Road. Chairman Cossart stated that the Selectmen are concerned with what they consider to be drastic changes in terms of the more extensive use of the property since Fort Devens took it over, and that the same has become a serious concern of the neighbors/residents of Sudbury as well. Chairman Cossart stated that he has had direct contact with Colonel Kattar, the former commander at Fort Devens, with no real relief. Chairman Cossart expressed his opinion that there is a very serious, philosophical point of how that property should be used in terms of being compatible to the residents. He stressed it is important for the people at Fort Devens to understand that the Army property is situated in the midst of a desirable, residential area (developed to the point where some of the homes are right up to the border of the Army property), and that there has been a very low level of activity here over the past years and the increased level of training taking place there now has become a problem.

Selectman Murray added that, during original discussions with, and communications from, people at Fort Devens, all indications were that the Town would be notified before any increased activities would take place at the Sudbury Annex; however, that was not the case - the Town was not notified, activities began earlier than the middle to late fall schedule, and the Selectmen's office began receiving complaints and inquiries regarding the activities, noise and gunfire at Fort Devens.

Congressman Shannon commented that Colonel Corbin is new to Fort Devens and really has had no part in past discussions between the Army and Selectmen. Congressman Shannon added that it was clear to him that there was a problem because his office had received complaints and had some discussion but has not had any exact details of the nature of the problem. Congressman Shannon stated that it has been his experience in dealing with the Army in the past that the Army is generally willing to work on a solution and, in that spirit, stated he would like to find some solution to the problem without restricting the property too greatly. Congressman Shannon further stated he would do everything he could to work toward that resolution.

Chairman Cossart introduced Representative Lucile Hicks who arrived at 7:40 p.m.

Col. Corbin first commented by indicating he inherited the apparent, existing problems between Fort Devens and the Town when he began as new Commander there and expressed his opinion that there is an appearance of a misunderstanding in terms of the how and when it would be used, and the level of activity scheduled at the Sudbury Annex of Fort Devens.

In terms of the level of training for the near future, Col. Corbin talked about reserve units training on site. He stated that the training in Sudbury would be of a lesser degree than at the other Fort Devens; posts in that there would be no live firing. Sudbury will now be used for military maneuvers because of the Army's shortage of land, and that the Sudbury terrain will accommodate a company size maneuver, approximately one hundred and fifty men, at one time. Col. Corbin expressed his understanding of the noise complaint by area residents but reiterated that only blanks are being used and only approximately one hundred and fifty men would use the terrain at one time.

The numbered items throughout the following context of the meeting are questions and concerns expressed throughout the evening, listed in order.

- 1) startled by nighttime gunfire with no warning; anxiety of it happening again;
- 2) expectations of residential area did not include hearing gunfire - no National peril, therefore should be no change in the status of military training, therefore no justification for changing the nature of the neighborhood;
- 3) complaints received from people as far away as Route 117 - not only a neighborhood problem;
- 4) the Town is in the process of reconsidering allowing hunting in Sudbury because of the annoyance of gunfire.

Representative Hicks asked if Fort Devens could operate the maneuver training at main headquarters, and/or if a blank could be used which does not have such a large crack when it explodes.

Col. Corbin stated that only the very minimal part of training is being done at the Sudbury Annex of Fort Devens; that a large range of weapons is used at the other posts. He added that, if the Sudbury Annex is to be used as a military property at all to train soldiers, it is necessary to do the kind of training being done there now. Col. Corbin explained that a certain amount of space for training is required for a given size organization, and reiterated that the Army has had a shortage in terms of land for training for several years.

Responding to Congressman Shannon, Major Block stated that several years ago Fort Devens was the only active installation in New England. National Guards units, etc., are currently looking for cheaper ways to train. The Army has over fifty thousand reservists assigned to Fort Devens, and to cut traveling costs and still accommodate these great numbers is the reason for the change in where the reservists train in Sudbury.

- 5) opposition to having to endure disturbances at Sudbury Annex especially early a.m. firing because the Army has financial difficulties.

Col. Corbin talked a little more about the fact that this shortage of space for training existed for sometime nationwide for active forces. As a result the standards for training were not what they should have been. Col. Corbin stated that, personally, he felt the big issue is that the Army should give soldiers

what they require in order to be trained properly. Col. Corbin stated that usually reserve units will spend about two days in the Sudbury Annex and that active units, depending on what task they are trying to accomplish, may sometimes remain longer than an overnight stay. The problem, he stated, is not how frequently each unit is in Sudbury but is the issue of what the schedule is of each unit that comes to Sudbury. Responding to Congressman Shannon, Col. Corbin stated that not all of this type of training is done in Sudbury.

- 6) question as to whether the Army is willing to work out a schedule that would limit the frequency or the time of day of gunfire and questioned a study conducted by Fort Devens which stated that the facility does not impact on the environment.

Col. Corbin stated that the environmental study is to be updated and the issues raised this evening will become part of the environmental impact assessment that the Army has to make. Col. Corbin stated it would be completed by July. Col. Corbin further stated that he felt he could only succeed in trying to get the best use of the area for the Army by working with everyone. He expressed his opinion that there is a change in the need to train our soldiers and his hope is that the Army could get better use of the Sudbury Annex land. He added that he felt the Army can accommodate the Town to a satisfactory degree, stating his opinion that this is a kind of conflict that there is no complete resolution to. Col. Corbin stated that he is interested in further dialogue, that he would like to explain the kinds of things the Army is doing on that base to confirm that there is no threat there.

- 7) threat is a non issue - resolution appears to be a) Army to convince residents to live with noise or b) neighbors complain until Army ceases.

Congressman Shannon stated that he hoped the Army could achieve getting the noise to a tolerable level with minimal frequencies, and that he did not think any of the people attending this meeting will be convinced that they have to tolerate the situation as it exists now.

- 8) danger of children getting into the camp.

Col. Corbin responded that the Army is not in the business of doing bad things to people. They are trying to balance the Army's intentions for the use of that property with being a good neighbor.

Representative Hicks stated that it is essential to set up an on-going structure for communication between the citizens and the base before adjourning tonight. Following further discussion and on the recommendation of Congressman Shannon later in the evening, it was a consensus of those in attendance that the Selectmen would appoint a liaison group representing the Selectmen (the Executive Secretary), Congressman Shannon (Aide David McGinn), and three residents (to be appointed by the Selectmen) and someone named later by Col. Corbin to represent Fort Devens.

(Three residents appointed later were: Mark Sugarman, John D. Dretler and Sidney Wittenberg.)

The residents who were present did not question the threat but rather plans for utilization and the frequency of the gunfire. Col. Corbin stated that there were units being scheduled for training which included the use of gunfire but he did not have the specifics. He further responded that he did not know if those plans included the use of simulators.

Congressman Shannon stated that it was unfair to ask Col. Corbin specific questions, that the important thing is to set some standards on how the property is going to be used and meet with representatives as noted above to discuss the specifics. Col. Corbin stated he would be happy to have his training director put together the numbers in terms of units planned for training and make a presentation. Congressman Shannon stated that they would have to go further than that - they would need to have a presentation, as well as a person who can adjust those plans if they need to be adjusted. Congressman Shannon stated that no commitment relative to nighttime gunfire is being asked of Col. Corbin this evening but that it is necessary for his training people and residents to talk about what the residents can anticipate so that there will be no surprises and to see if there is any flexibility in changing those plans.

Major Block stated that the only maneuvers scheduled at the present time is January 26 for a Field Training Exercise (FTX) - a day and night maneuver. Congressman Shannon stated that there are four weeks before that date and asked that something be scheduled before that date.

Mr. McGinn stated that the underlying problem is that there is a lot of preparation in terms of the land going from a passive use to an active use and it is a real adjustment period.

Col. Corbin stated he is bothered by that issue and that, although he is sympathetic to the issue and the problems involved, he is looking at it from the Army's viewpoint and it is not that "cut and dried".

- 9) some residents will not be satisfied with the alternative of day-time only gunfire;
- 10) issue of decrease in property value with firing disturbances and potential for other problems. Would like to see history of past (1981-82) training in order to anticipate 1983 and define the standards or goals that have to be met.

Col. Corbin stated for himself as well as for the Army that they plan to bring benefits to the community in terms of allowing local recreational use of the property.

- 11) immediate plans vs. increased long-range plans.

Col. Corbin stated that they have projected plans only through the summer (July) at which time the assessment will be reviewed, and that assessment will include information gathered from the time Fort Devens became responsible for the Sudbury Annex. Col. Corbin further stated this assessment will address many of the issues discussed.

In response to Chairman Cossart, Col. Corbin stated that he has the latitude to make some adjustments.

Chairman Cossart stated that people are telling him 1) they do not accept the fact that there is an overwhelming requirement to use the property as the Army is now, and 2) people bought their property and feel they want to enjoy it as they see fit and not have to put up with the type of activities taking place there, namely, gunfire - they want to know what the specific plans are and if those plans can be adjusted.

Col. Corbin replied that he had very clearly stated that there is a schedule now and there can be adjustments to that schedule possibly before July.

Congressman Shannon requested that when the next meeting is scheduled (before January 26) Col. Corbin should provide information on specific plans, (dates and uses) and define changes if they can be made.

- 12) Selectmen should determine what kind of use is acceptable before proceeding and further.

Chairman Cossart stated that the Selectmen have nothing to say about the density of the use as the land is owned by the U. S. Government for the U. S. Army.

At the close of the meeting, Chairman Cossart thanked everyone for attending, and the Executive Secretary was directed to schedule a mutually agreeable meeting date, prior to January 26, of the liaison group. The Board then appointed three residents to the liaison committee, as listed earlier.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Attest: _____
Richard E. Thompson
Executive Secretary-Clerk