

THE CLOSING OF MILITARY BASES IN NEW ENGLAND: DOES THE MILITARY EVER REALLY LEAVE?

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ABSTRACT

The physical and cultural patinas of military places are so fixed in the collective memories of New Englanders that well after closure, they remain part of our culture. At times, it may be that some military reserve functions remain, some military research is ongoing, or simply that the land, long ago contaminated by fuel or the debris of weapons firing, is permanently off-limits. Other times, it may be the rigid precise layout of the barracks square, solidly built structures, or the placement of historic objects. The fact remains that military bases remain military in the region's collective memory well after active forces have left. The paper begins with our examination of how New England military installations have been transformed since World War II. There are tens of installations that have been closed or dramatically changed since that time. We then determine, analyse and explain the characteristics that resulted in their having a continued military presence. Finally, we summarize our results to date.

Keywords: base closings, military legacy, repurposing military bases.

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, we have been involved, as academic researchers and planning consultants, in analysing the impacts of actual and potential military base closings throughout New England. At times, this work was simply to assess property records for the Boston Navy Yard, Massachusetts; undertake citizen participation exercises for the Portsmouth's Naval Shipyard, Kittery, Maine; prepare a master plan for Camp Edwards, Cape Cod, Massachusetts; analyse the market potential for development at Quonset Point, Rhode Island or determine fiscal impacts for development at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. At other times, we have undertaken research projects on former naval ports concerning regeneration, cost of operation studies at closed bases and the reuse of closed National Guard Armories. In all of this work, we have been struck by the fact that it is indeed rare when the United States Department of Defence completely abandons a facility. Somehow these bases either continue to house some military functions or maintain the patina of military activity. These places may cease to house active military organizations and the military bases may be sold while military organizations remain as renters, or the military may leave but be replaced by companies undertaking military research and development activities or even as contractors repairing military vehicles, and/or they may become places that reflect and commemorate the accomplishments of soldiers, sailors and airmen and women with small museums and memorial parks. Yet, even after they close, regardless of the extent of military tenancy, there are constant reminders that the active military once occupied the site. In Boston's Navy Yard, the streets, unlike the city's colonial, organic pattern, are laid with echoes of a simple Roman Castrum. It looks like a typical 19th-century Navy Base. At Devens, some of the streets are named in honour of great battles and heroes. At Westover Air Force Reserve Base (Chicopee, Massachusetts), nearby residents clearly can feel the vibrations and hear the sounds of C5A cargo planes warming up to take off on weekend reserve training missions. And our National Guard Armories, overwhelmingly built of brick and granite with castle-like overtones, announce to the public,

regardless of whether they are still functioning as training centres, that they are symbols of protection. Across New England, in town after town, these structures stand out as among the most unique in the community [1].

Our working hypothesis for this paper is that the physical and cultural patinas of military places are so fixed in the collective memories of New Englanders that well after closure, they remain part of our culture. At times, it may be that some military reserve functions remain, some military research is ongoing, or simply that the land, long ago contaminated by fuel or the debris of weapons firing, is permanently off-limits. Other times, it may be the rigid precise layout of the barracks square, solidly built structures, or the placement of historic objects. The fact remains that military bases remain military in the region's collective memory well after active forces have left.

One should note in the previous paragraph our use of the phrase 'working hypothesis'. Throughout our research and consulting assignments, we were never asked to study or analyse the question of the degree to which the military was entrenched in our culture or the physical form of the host community. However, as we continue with our work, it has become quite clear that the residents of these places never completely shut out the memory of their coexistence with the armed forces. Moreover, state, regional and local governments, more often than not, have been willing to invest their assets to keep the collective memory of these installations alive, to maintain and stimulate the economic growth of these places and to commemorate the sense of place created by them [2].

For purposes of this paper, we have concentrated on those installations that housed troop organizations. They are places where large numbers of soldiers, sailors, coastguardsmen and women and airmen and women were trained or stationed. There are other installations that served the military but which were overwhelmingly places of civilian employment and have been closed. These include, for example, the Watertown Massachusetts Arsenal, the Springfield Massachusetts Armoury and the Stratford Connecticut Army Engine Plant. There are still other sites that were quite small which were designed for the placement of Ajax or Hercules missiles during the Cold War. There were 13 such sites in Massachusetts alone. These installations and sites are a topic for a future paper.

The paper begins with our examination of how New England military installations have been transformed since World War II. There are tens of installations that have been closed or dramatically changed since that time. We then determine, analyse and explain the characteristics that resulted in their having a continued military presence. Finally, we summarize our results to date.

2 DOES THE MILITARY EVER LEAVE?

The most common type of legacy military presence has been National Guard and Army Reserve Forces that have been stationed over portions of the region's installations after the active forces have been reassigned elsewhere.

For reasons of clarity, it is important to realize that the National Guard and Army Reserve Forces in the United States have strategic and tactical missions in support of the nation's active forces as well, in terms of the National Guard, assignments in support of state emergencies such as forest fires, extreme weather incidents or civil unrest. Both the Guard and Reserve are controlled, equipped and paid by the Department of Defence. They are far more linked to the active forces than in, for example, Canada or Great Britain. For example, virtually every guard unit in Massachusetts has been activated for service in Kuwait, Iran and Afghanistan since the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991. As well, domestically, virtually all soldiers in the

Guard have been activated for safety and security purposes during times of civil unrest (such as riots and demonstrations), instances of severe weather (such as hurricanes Sandy, Harvey and Maria) or terror attacks (such as the attack on the World Trade Center or the Boston Marathon bombings). It is far more probable that anyone strolling the streets in New England cities, upon noticing someone walking in uniform, would be looking at a member of the Guard or Reserve. And in looking around the region's industrial cities, our worker would see mostly National Guard Armories rather than active military installations. These structures are often architecturally stately and stand as sentinels to ensure positive civic discourse.

There are very few active members of the Air Force, Army, Navy or Marines, relative to the rest of the country, in New England. Since 1988, the Department of Defence has looked to the region as a place to remove large military organizations and to close military bases. Active-duty troops have declined in New England from 30,600 in 1988 to 12,700 today. In Massachusetts alone, the state housed 9,555 troops in 1988 and only 2,427 today [3]. It is clear that the Department of Defence is looking elsewhere in the nation for the placement of troops or expansion of bases.

Arguably, the most significant continued presence has been the placement of Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard units in former active Air Force or Navy installations. For example, the former Air Force and Naval installations at Ethan Allen Air Force Base (Vermont), Pease Air Force Base (New Hampshire), Dover Air Force Base (Maine), Bradley Field (Connecticut), Quonset Naval Air Station (Rhode Island) and Westover Air Force Base (Massachusetts) all have been designated in part for use by Guard and Reserve forces. Many of these bases played significant military roles in World War II, the Cold War and recent military activities in Iran and Afghanistan.

The importance of the decision to maintain these bases for military purposes, albeit at a much smaller scale, is twofold. First, as time has shown, they provide the means to complement active Air Force activities in the National defence. In the case of Westover, it has played a critical role in moving troops and supplies to the Gulf since 1991. It is the largest, in terms of land mass, Air Force Reserve Base in the United States. Indeed, because of its size, it was selected as an emergency landing site for the Space Shuttle. In the case of Otis Air Force Base, Massachusetts National Guard jets were the first military responders during the attack on the World Trade Center.

The second key aspect is the fact that the cost of maintaining and operating the bases is provided, to a large degree, out of Department of Defence funds. This has enabled the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as an illustration, to create a public airport on shared Air Force property. Called Westover Metropolitan Airport, it now serves the metropolitan area of Greater Springfield. The Air Reserve Base currently provides 3,248 jobs and contributes approximately 212 million dollars to the regional economy. Moreover, due to the shared use of the facility, its state-of-the-art infrastructure and available parcels, the base has become an attractive venue for other military units and private users. The present data show that the Air Reserve portion of the Base provides approximately 3,500 jobs and contributes more than 210 million dollars to the local economy. Perhaps quite surprisingly, it also has attracted 28 other smaller military units as tenants. From the civilian side, in four industrial/office parks, located on surplus land next to the airport, more than 50 transport, manufacturing, research and development businesses, among others, have found homes. They collectively employ more than 3,200 workers. There is little doubt that the civilian airport would not have been developed, the additional private-sector jobs created or the tax base expanded in the adjacent communities without the presence of the legacy units [4].

The presence of Guard and Reserve units at other former active force bases including today's Portsmouth International Airport and Quonset Point Airport have created similar circumstances. Portsmouth International Airport was created on the premises of the former Pease Air Force Base which closed with the loss of 10,000 jobs in 1991. After closure, the New Hampshire National Guard provided a stabilizing presence through the stationing of its air refuelling wing and aircraft. This wing employs 380 full-time and 950 part-time military jobs today. Beyond this, there are now more than 10,000 civilian workers at the former base, many of whom are now employees at the airport [5]. Of all the military services in the United States, it is the Air Force that appears more apt to support legacy operations than any other military branch.

The US Navy has not adopted a legacy continuation approach at its closed naval air stations. However, in the case of its Brunswick, Quonset and Weymouth Air Stations, other military branches have stepped forward. In the case of the Brunswick station, located on a beautiful section of Maine's mid-coast, the air facilities have been transformed into the Brunswick Executive Airport. However, it does house an Army Reserve Center [6]. At Quonset, the Rhode Island Air National Guard is now stationed in the former navy installation and is providing a stabilizing influence on its continued use for civilian air traffic. It is because of the State of Rhode Island's comprehensive investment, including the Air National Guard, that the recovery of Quonset has been so successful. By investing in air, land and sea infrastructure improvements, the state has now assisted in the creation of 11,000 jobs employed by 200 companies [7]. Weymouth, like Brunswick, has only a small military tenant: a Coast Guard buoy repair shop [8].

The case of the closed Boston Navy Yard (1974), in contrast, has been an overwhelming success and one in which the Navy has continued to play a crucial role. Now a national historic park, it houses the famed USS Constitution, the oldest commissioned sailing ship in the United States Navy. The ship, with its support facilities, as well as the shipyard's now repurposed barracks, workshops and office buildings, has been the stimulus for the regeneration of Boston's Charlestown neighbourhood into one of the city's more attractive neighbourhoods [9]. This stimulus even extended far beyond the neighbourhood into the nearby city of Chelsea where a former Naval Hospital (also part of the National Historic Park) has sparked renewed interest in revitalization. Chelsea, hardscrabble-like and downtrodden, full of oil terminals, scrapyards and aging piers, has yet to experience the economic upturns and dynamic growth of other industrial communities surrounding Boston. Located on Chelsea's Admiralty Hill and consisting of, arguably, the most impressive set of structures in the city, the hospital site, like the USS Constitution, is a cornerstone of Chelsea's revitalization strategy. While the hospital is no longer operated by the military, it is clear that the structures, by the quality of their architecture, iconic presence, setting and image of permanence, provide a powerful contribution to Chelsea's sense of place [10].

In New London, Connecticut, the former site of Fort Trumbull, now a state park, is the keystone for the revitalization of its waterfront located along the shoreline of the Thames River. Like the USS Constitution and Chelsea Naval Hospital sites, it is the crown jewel for a comprehensive revitalization plan for a decayed and long ignored section of the city. The Fort served as an active defence facility from the time of the American Revolution into the Cold War, including serving as the home of the Coast Guard Academy (1915–1932) and later, the site of the Navy's Underwater Sound Laboratories (1950–1996) [11].

As with the location of the Chelsea Naval Hospital, it is the architectural quality of the structures and the site characteristics, as well as contributions to military history, that are

most valued. There is one other factor that is important: New London is a sailor's town with its history as a submarine port, submarine construction centre, underwater sound research centre and the home of the United States Coast Guard Academy. The patina of place has been shaped by hundreds of years of sailors and Coast Guardsmen passing through its streets, making the city their home and forming its cultural character. The evidence can be found in countless ways from the walk of the sailor through the Waterfront Historic District to the strong, orderly image of its structures along Bank Street. New London may have less military presence than in the past, but it still feels like a sailor's town.

Indeed, a look at the current revitalization plan for the Fort Trumbull area shows the importance of the facility, along with its adjacent Coast Guard Station, as anchors for its regeneration. The plan calls for moorings, a commercial fishing pier, water taxi service, walking trails and mixed use housing and retail shops. A critical part of the plan is that Fort Trumbull will serve as an anchor destination as part of a network of heritage trails [12]. None of this would have happened without the rich legacy of Fort Trumbull, the presence of the Coast Guard and the commitment of the people of New London to support the historic traditions of its maritime past [13]. One can clearly understand why the city was selected to be the future home of the National Coast Guard Museum.

As closely affiliated as Fort Trumbull is to the history and culture and current planning of New London, the experience of naval installations in Newport has been much different. Newport's naval military history has been rich with the city's ships and sailors playing major roles in virtually every war from the Revolution to the present. It has served as the home of the United States Naval Academy, the site for an Endicott coastal defence installation called Fort Adams, home to the Goat Island Naval Torpedo Station and the host of the cruiser–destroyer fleet of the United States Naval Atlantic fleet. At present it is the locale for the United States Naval War College, Naval Station Newport, the Navy Undersea Warfare Center and a Navy Training Center. Clearly, Newport continues to serve the nation's defence as a centre for naval education research and training. It is the third largest employer in Rhode Island [14].

But what is most interesting is how the closing of its facilities and the adding of new functions has changed the community fabric. For example, the former Goat Island Naval Torpedo Station, active throughout the first half of the 20th century, was located within a mile of the city's downtown and clearly observable by those passing by on the shore side. It occupied the island with its shops, barracks, torpedo boats, offices and warehouses. Today, there is virtually no evidence that the torpedo factory with all its ancillary facilities ever existed on an island in Newport Harbour. Only one former, unrecognizable navy building, now a bar and grille, exists. The Island is now dominated by a hotel, with banquet, restaurant and conference facilities. The physical presence of this once vibrant installation has been virtually wiped away. A comparison of Goat Island with Fort Adams, within line of sight of Goat Island, could not be more opposite: Fort Adams is in the midst of restoration. It is ironic that Newport, often nicknamed 'The City by the Sea' and 'Sailing Capital of the World', has so little evidence of the Navy in its downtown harbour. Its sole military installation in its port is a tiny 19th-century closed-army facility of great character but little fame [15].

Given that our working hypothesis is that the military never leaves and that the evidence in Newport's harbour is that the military did indeed leave, how can we continue to defend our position? We do so in two ways. First, the naval personnel may have moved away from the central harbour and downtown areas but they were relocated nearby. They can be seen as members of local committees, spending their social and economic capital throughout Newport and its surrounding towns. Second, as Newport lost naval functions, new ones replaced

them. Third, Newport's navy personnel, with the exception of its recruit and officer training students, are far more orientated to the intellectual and scientific side of warfare than part of direct warfare. These activities are more schoolroom orientated than sea-based training. What one can see is the hundreds of sailors visiting the city centre to shop, eat or recreate. Mixing with long-term residents, college students and tourists, they are part of Newport's dynamic pulse. Fourth, Newport, while a small port city, was never dominated by the navy. It was just as much the crown jewel of Gilded Era mansions of the 19th-century wealthy and the home of America's Cup, America's most prestigious yacht race, as it was a centre of naval activity. In New London, it is the physical characteristics of Fort Trumbull and the Coast Guard Station that come to mind. In downtown Newport, it is the naval personnel and families that represent the continuity of the military traditions.

The only major army installation in New England since the end of World War II was Fort Devens. Located on approximately 5,000 acres in the Massachusetts town of Ayer, Harvard and Shirley, it served, at times, as a training centre for New England inductees, the home of several large military units, the Army's Intelligence School and Special Forces Units. It also provided training opportunities for New England's National Guard and Reserve Forces. From its formation as Camp Devens in 1917 through the Gulf War, more than 400 units trained at the Fort. It was closed as an active military installation in 1996 [16]. At that time, it was transferred to the Massachusetts Development Agency who had the responsibility of managing the area as an economic development zone. Its efforts in stimulating the economic regeneration of the facility have been most successful. It is now the home of high-technology companies, a shopping centre, a community college and several small manufacturing companies. Now called Devens, it has all the characteristics of a small, prosperous town [17]. At the time of closure, the Department of Defence designated a portion of property to become a reserve training site for Army Reserve and Marine Reserve and National Guard units. This compound of Devens has retained the name Fort Devens. Furthermore, other military uses have returned to the compound.

3 PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

From the above, a series of key points emerge that show, at least in the case of New England, that most closed military bases do have some form of military activity continuing well after the active forces have relocated.

The most significant contribution centres upon former active-duty bases that are close to metropolitan areas. The former Ethan Allen Air Force Base (Vermont), Dow Air Force Base (Maine), Bradley Army Air Base (Connecticut), Pease Air Force Base (New Hampshire), Westover Air Base (Massachusetts) and Quonset Point (Rhode Island) are examples where this has occurred. All of these former active-duty installations now have Air National Guard or Air Reserve units. These units have contributed immeasurably to the successful transformation of these bases to civilian airports.

Concerning Navy Air Stations that have been closed under Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) [18], there continues to be a range of legacy military activity. At times, such as at Brunswick, and South Weymouth, it is quite small. In the case of Quonset Point, it has been significant. What is most interesting is that as the Navy withdrew from these stations, other non-navy military organizations chose to occupy them. Concerning active army installations, the only active-duty installation since the end of World War II dedicated to the stationing of a large number of troops was Fort Devens. Even though officially closed, it still maintains an active-duty presence (i.e. having housing for Air Force personnel stationed at nearby Hanscom

Air Force Base and now the home of two army laboratories) and a strong army reserve compound. The economic district now called Devens contains a 'fort within a former fort'.

There are outliers. Grenier Air Force Base, Manchester, New Hampshire, built in 1927, served as both an active and a reserve air base until 1966. Today, it functions as Manchester–Boston Airport and has no military presence. However, one can make the argument that because it remained an active air reserve base on several occasions between 1955 and 1966, it enables the city of Manchester to purchase a working facility at an appropriate moment [19]. Beyond Grenier, there is only minimal military presence at the former Loring Air Base (Maine). This base was closed in 1994 and had the most devastating community impact of any former installation in New England. It has a small military presence but has failed to attract significant investment.

Has New England gained or lost from base closings? In a cultural and economic sense, it has clearly gained. The largest airports in Connecticut, Maine and Vermont all benefited from the fact that they once housed active military units. The switch from active to reserve use at Chicopee's Westover Airbase resulted in enormous infrastructure upgrades, new job opportunities, a new civilian passenger terminal and four new industrial parks on the former base lands. In 2017, it was announced that the University of Massachusetts will begin researching the future use of various types of drones for public and private use at the facility. Similarly, civilian and military aircraft joint use could also be noted at Quonset Point. The fact that military units once occupied these places, invested in them up to the removal of military active-duty troops and continue to occupy the space today is significant.

At Devens, once New England's largest military base in terms of troops, the presence of reserve troops from the day the base formally closed helped to mitigate any feelings that the closing would be disastrous. Moreover, the military never stopped investing in the Fort Devens compound. It is now a place where military and civilian workers clearly intermingle.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In a final summation, while New England's economy has been buffeted by the closing of military bases from time to time, they, with the exception of Loring's Air Force Base, have been far from devastating. There are many reasons for this. Above all though, it has been the continuous presence of the military throughout the closing process which has contributed to a planning climate that could be classified as managing change rather than crisis. And the fact that, in the overwhelming number of bases that have closed, the military has remained in some manner to help create a feeling that the Army, Navy and Air Force have not abandoned New England.

In a cultural sense, the closings have contributed to some sense of loss. After all, the Springfield Armoury (1777–1968) made thousands of weapons used by our soldiers from the Revolutionary War to the Vietnam conflict. The Boston Navy Yard played a similar role in terms of making and repairing ships from 1801 to 1974. These bases, among others, are no longer active players in the national defence. Fewer people work in them, fewer people depend upon them and, instead of being noisy, smelly and loud places of production, they are now passive places to reflect on the historic accomplishments of the nation. They represent neither the present nor the future. At the same time, they are places that are indelibly inked in the fabric of the community and provide communities with a great deal of pride. These bases will not be quickly forgotten.

The United States government still funds too many military installations. And yet Congress has failed to approve any future BRAC activity. We believe that more closings will occur in

New England. In the last BRAC round in 2005, the committee placed Portsmouth Navy Yard, Otis Air National Guard Base and the New London Connecticut Naval Submarine Base on the list. After further review, all three were withdrawn. We believe all three to be candidates for closure in the next round. Westover Air Reserve Base (Massachusetts) is too large for Air Force needs and is likely to be a candidate for downsizing and the fact that Hanscom Air Base is heavily invested in research, and has little bearing on immediate and direct threats to the nation, makes it a likely candidate for close scrutiny. If all of this occurs, we expect that New England would continue to be the least militarized region of the nation. It will be the nation's region that thinks about war but does not train for war.

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