

Russ Burgos

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How did Ft. Bragg become Ft. Bragg? A thread.

1/ According to [@Catherine Lutz](#)'s excellent book, *_Homefront_*, in June 1918 the Army came to Fayetteville to scout a site for an artillery camp. The Fayetteville city fathers initially wanted the arsenal reopened, but money talks.

2/The Army chose the site for a number of sound logistical reasons, plus, as Lutz writes, "the choice [was not] hurt by a local boy's connections to the chief of staff, General William Snow. This lawyer & soldier, Captain Donald F. Ray, had...pressed the case for his hometown."

3/According to the finding aid for the Ray Family Papers at UNC, Donald Fairfax Ray, a UNC law grad, was the son of former Fayetteville Mayor and Confederate veteran Neill W. Ray. Young Ray was himself an artillery officer.

4/On 16 August 1918, the Wilmington Morning Star and several other NC papers ran a story reporting that "a high official source in Washington" advised former US Rep John G. Shaw of Fayetteville that the new camp would be named for Braxton Bragg.

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(Special Star Correspondence.) -
Fayetteville, Aug. 15.—Camp Bragg is to be the name of the artillery training camp established near this city, according to information received here from a high official source in Washington. Hon. John G. Shaw, of this city, has received a letter from a military officer whose recommendation is probably final, conveying the information that he has recommended that the Fayetteville camp be named for Gen. Braxton Bragg. The officer in question holds the opinion that the camp should

5/ The unnamed "high official source" was said to be a "military officer whose recommendation is probably final." As Lutz notes (p. 24), young Ray had a connection to "General William Snow." I believe this was likely MG William J. Snow, the first Chief of Field Artillery.



6/ The Ray family papers finding aid notes that after promotion to CPT, Ray went to Ft. Sill, OK, "where he died suddenly on July 6." No cause of death is given, but already in July 1918, the 5th Artillery Brigade in France was reporting flu infections.

7/ So my theory is that Ray, an artillery officer, suggested to the Chief of Artillery that the new artillery base in his hometown be named for a Confederate artillery officer, and that when young Ray died suddenly and tragically, doing so would have honored his wishes.

8/ Since a number of camps were also being named for Confederates, and since Bragg was initially supposed to be a temporary facility only, from a purely bureaucratic perspective it would have been an easy way of clearing one's agenda of an item and...

9/ ... given the family connection to MG Snow, would likely have been seen as doing the bereaved family a kindness.

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Hat tip to [@DrRobThompson](#) for (inadvertently) sending me down this rabbit hole.

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/ADDENDUM - running down details of CPT Ray's death. He was on the Chief of Field Artillery's staff at Camp (Ft) Jackson prior to reporting to Sill for the aerial observer course, where he "fell from fever." So his connection to Snow was quite close.

Ray had attended the 1916 Plattsburg army training camp and went on active duty in July 1917. His funeral was held at Fayetteville's First Presbyterian.



Most interestingly, it seems that before the war Ray was a County Commissioner, which would have given him some influence in offering land for the proposed camp to the federal government on favorable terms.

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Replying to a former student on Facebook, I wrote this. I just don't think that nearly as much thought went into naming these bases as we seem to think there was, if only because they were supposed to be temporary anyway.



This hypothesis certainly bolsters what I was told by one of my previous History professors. The Civil War had only been over for a little over 50 years, and I can imagine that emotions were still pretty raw on both sides. However, in order to fight the Great War, the nation would have to come together. In order to appease local leaders, and perhaps recruit more Southerners to the Nation's cause, certain concessions were made on who the Camp's would be named after. While Bragg's Civil War record was less than stellar, he did evoke a certain amount of pride from Soldiers in the South. One can certainly appreciate the irony of the Fort's namesake and the particular "unique" units that are based there now. Over 155 years and those same wounds that led to the naming of the base still exist in our country.

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Russ Burgos It's possible, but I think that professor might have overstated the "rawness" of the feelings. The 1910s were the high point of the Lost Cause mythology, and the antebellum South was viewed quite favorably and quite romantically across the country. "Birth of a Nation" had been a HUGE movie hit in 1915. Ray was the son of a Confederate. This was, of course, Confederate country. Bragg himself was not as poorly regarded then as he is now, owing largely to his performance in the Mexican War. The Chief of Field Artillery was a West Point graduate; Bragg, of course, was a North Carolinian and had been a West Point graduate and an artilleryman; and the camp was going to be temporary anyway. So if we put on our 1918 glasses, all of that would suggest to me that the idea of naming the camp for Bragg would have been in some sense "obvious." Frankly, I'd be surprised if much more thought than that had gone into it.

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May 19th

Things @thejointstat ²⁰²⁰ have known before embarking on #PME reform (1/3): * avg war college/ILE graduating class gpa since Goldwater-Nichols * # of failed/dropped students * avg undergrad gpa of all students since G-N * sources of undergrad degrees of all students since G-N

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Nov 10th

What is the genealogy of ²⁰¹⁹ "veteran-ness?" (A multi-part thread) What (if anything) is a democratic society's obligation to its veterans in the 21st century? One thing I'd be interested in seeing is a kind of historical tracing of what veteran status has meant over time.

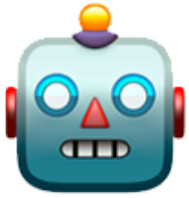
My sense is that there is an over-expectation of

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