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WHERE ARE N.C. TEAMS HEADED?
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NORTH CAROLINA'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER — ESTABLISHED 1816

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Funding concerns hold up loop bids

■ The state DOT is giving contractors a chance to factor in lower fuel costs.

By Andrew Barksdale
Staff writer

Work on the next phase of the long-sought Fayetteville Outer Loop will be delayed for a second time in a month.

Bids on the \$270 million project were supposed to be opened in November to extend the future Interstate 295 — which stops at Ramsey Street in northern Fayetteville — westward to the All American Freeway.

The N.C. Department of Transportation delayed that action until Dec. 16 to give contractors time to reduce their costs for fuel and oil-based asphalt materials.

Last week, the department decided to delay the bids again — to Jan. 20.

Department spokesman Ernie Seneca said the reason for the second delay was twofold: To give bidders more time to react to plummeting gas prices and to give state lawmakers a cushion toward the escalating budget crisis.

He said the fuel savings could mean a significant decrease in bids, but he declined to guess by how much.

“The other thing is the uncertainty of the funding project,” he said Thursday. “We’ll continue to evaluate whether we need to push projects back.”

Fiscal researchers in the legislature project a \$1 billion deficit in the state’s \$21.3 billion budget this year. Some analysts said the red ink could top \$3 billion as the recession brings more layoffs and reduces spending.

Some mayors and lawmakers from Charlotte and Raleigh complained last month that money to complete their loops has been stalled while the state Board of Transportation gave the go-ahead to spend \$270 million on Fayetteville’s next section. Some saw the appropriation as cronyism.

Lyndo Tippett, the transportation secretary who lives in Fayetteville, has called the accusations silly. It was just Fayetteville’s turn to get loop money, he said last month.

Mac Campbell, Cumberland County’s representative on the Board of Transportation, said

See **OUTER LOOP**, Page 4A

IRAQ CASUALTIES



Roger Suarez keeps a photo of his son, Pfc. Roger Suarez-Gonzalez, in the restaurant he owns in Carson City, Nev. Suarez-Gonzalez was killed in Iraq on Dec. 4, 2006, in an incident that was originally recorded as an insurgent attack.

AP photo

A father’s search for answers

A video posted on the Internet raises the possibility of friendly fire in the deaths of two Fort Carson soldiers.

By Erica Werner and Kimberly Hefling

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After Roger Suarez’s eldest son died in Iraq two years ago, the grieving father buried him in his homeland of Nicaragua and tried to move on.

In recent weeks, Suarez’s emotional wounds have been ripped open. A video was posted online of a chaotic firefight that involved his 21-year-old son, Pfc. Roger Suarez-Gonzalez. Taken from a camera mounted on a soldier’s helmet, it raised the possibility that his son and another soldier died not by enemy fire as their families were told but by U.S. tank rounds in a “friendly fire” incident.

“I don’t feel satisfied,” Suarez said in Spanish in a telephone interview from Carson City, Nev., where he and his wife own a small restaurant, Lady Tamales.

“I would like a second opinion,” Suarez said. “I have the opinion of the Army, but I’d like someone to



Pfc. Roger Suarez-Gonzalez was 21 when he was killed in Iraq.



Pfc. Albert Nelson, who was 31, also died in fighting in Ramadi.

give me another opinion.”

Suarez is not the only one questioning the Army’s conclusion.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has instructed his staff to work with the Army and the Suarez family to review the incident and see whether anything more should be done. Two House members are asking the Pentagon for a new investigation into the deaths of Suarez-Gonzalez and Pfc. Albert Nelson, 31, of Philadelphia.

The two died Dec. 4, 2006, while

fighting in Ramadi, Iraq, with the 2nd Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division from Fort Carson, Colo.

“It is imperative that factual information, no matter how painful, is provided to the victim’s families,” wrote Rep. Chaka Fattah, D-Pa. The second request was from Rep. Dean Heller, R-Nev.

Internet video

In October, Salon.com posted an edited, 12-minute version of helmet-camera video showing U.S. soldiers in an intermittent firefight admiring a U.S. tank from the window of a building. A giant blast suddenly explodes the window, and they recoil.

“Dude, that was the tank,” one says.

“Is he shooting at us?” asks another.

“I think so,” replies the first. Later, soldiers describe enemy mortars coming at them.

Both Suarez and Nelson’s mother,

See **SOLDIERS**, Page 4A

Bragg project to bring in jobs

■ The government will spend \$288.5 million to build command headquarters here.

By Henry Cuningham
Military editor

Fort Bragg will break ground today for a \$288.5 million building project that will employ more than 400 people at its peak.

The 10 a.m. invitation-only event will signal the start of construction on the headquarters for Forces Command and U.S. Army Reserve Command, which must move from Atlanta in less than three years. The ceremony will be at the construction site at Knox and Randolph streets.

The start-up ensures the long-awaited project will happen as advertised, bringing short-term construction jobs and long-term, high-paying civil service jobs. For Forces Command alone, the average civilian salary is \$78,000 a year, and the average military salary is \$93,000.

The scheduled completion for construction is June 21, 2011.

The Savannah District of the Army Corps of Engineers on Sept. 20 awarded the design-build contract to Hensel Phelps Construction Co. of Chantilly, Va. A total of \$315 million has been budgeted to include Corps of Engineers supervision, administration costs and “project contingency funds.”

Steven Speer is the vice president and mid-Atlantic district manager for Hensel Phelps.

“I just want to caution everybody,” Speer said. “There’s always a lot of excitement after a new project and the size of it. It doesn’t happen tomorrow. It comes over time.”

The 2005 base closure and realignment law mandates the completion of the moves of the four-star and three-star commands from Fort McPherson in south Atlanta to Fort Bragg by Sept. 15, 2011.

“As I’ve been around the See **FORT BRAGG**, Page 4A



Speer

Grandparents caring for 2 girls

At 63, Elizabeth has learned to be a full-time parent again.

She and her husband have custody of two of their granddaughters. One is 15, and her sister is 5.

A family tragedy two years ago landed their mother in prison. Now, the two girls are living with their Fayetteville grandparents.

“They don’t see their mother,” Elizabeth said.

Elizabeth, who assumed she would be an empty-nester by now, is upbeat about the added responsibility.

“It’s different,” she said. “We raised our children.”

Elizabeth is a cashier at a local restaurant; her husband is partially disabled with poor eyesight and doesn’t work.

“We live off basically what I See **CHRISTMAS**, Page 4A

Donors respond to call for help



**SALVATION
ARMY
CHRISTMAS
FUND**

The Christmas spirit must be catching hold if today’s list is any indication.

It’s the longest one of the campaign as more and more people help the Bill Shaw Salvation Army Christmas Fund reach out to the needy in our community.

Eleanor O’Farrell tops the list with her \$1,000 contribution, and there are quite a few other large contributors to-

day, so please take time to check the list.

We want you to know who all our donors are, large and small, and we want to thank them for doing their part to spread Christmas cheer into every corner of town.

All the money we collect will be used by the Salvation Army for its Christmas program and a variety of

See **FUND**, Page 4A

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TOMORROW

■ **Sports:** The Carolina Panthers and Tampa Bay Buccaneers fight for the top spot in the NFC South.
■ **Life:** Considering the success of female politicians in 2008, is this the year of the woman?

WEATHER



■ Mostly sunny with a high of 54, **12B**

