

# ALA American Library Association

March 26, 2007

The Honorable Preston M. Geren  
Acting Secretary of the United States Army  
United States Department of Defense  
101 Army Pentagon, Room 3E588  
Washington, D.C. 20310-0101  
*Copy sent via fax: 703-697-0720*

Dear Secretary Geren:

I am writing to convey the American Library Association's (ALA) deep concerns about the closing of the Fort Huachuca, Arizona base library.

This award-winning library has been a valued resource for military families since 1879. In 2006, 38,359 active duty soldiers and their families visited the library, and library staff answered over 4,000 reference questions. The Fort Huachuca Library provides a myriad of services beyond traditional library service to deployed soldiers and their families. Closing this library, especially during a time of war, will deprive soldiers and their families of an important resource for education, information, technology, as well as morale-building.

Founded in 1876, the ALA is the oldest and largest library association in the world with 65,000 individual members and 4,000 library and corporate members dedicated to improving library services and promoting the public interest in a free and open information society.

The leadership of Fort Huachuca has ordered the closing of the library and will send soldiers and their families seeking library services to the Sierra Vista City Library, located ten minutes off-base. With this arrangement, soldiers and their families will receive a fraction of services they currently receive, and their children will no longer be able to bicycle to the library. **Soldiers and their families serving a nation at war will lose access to an on-base library, staff familiar with military-related information, as well as services including:**

- paperback book kits for deployments, maneuvers, and field libraries;
- "Read to the Kids" family literacy programs for deployed families;
- other programs available through military-only networks such as the Family Readiness Group and Army Continuing Education Services;

- the General Library Information Systems (GLIS), a web-based information system operating over the Army Knowledge Online (AKO) that enables deployed soldiers to borrow books from installation libraries while in Iraq and Afghanistan, with no penalties incurred if the books are not returned; and
- a valuable network of 19 full-text searchable databases, a resource that most libraries do not have.

One of the most devastating effects of the closure will be the loss of the library reference staff who are experienced and knowledgeable in fielding military and military family-related questions. The loss of this information service at a time when critical information is needed more than ever will have a devastating impact on soldiers and their families. Base personnel and families rely on these librarians to answer questions about the military and deployments, as well as for assistance in using the Army's intranet. That this vital service is being taken away from soldiers and their families at a time of enormous personal sacrifice seems unconscionable.

The Defense Authorization Act of 2005, allowed Fort Huachuca and Fort Gordon to pursue pilot programs in which the Army could partner with municipalities on delivering certain services, such as trash removal, and utilities. Somehow library service was also included in this list. Fort Gordon chose to partner with the city of Augusta on other services, but not libraries.

Fort Huachuca pursued a partnership with the city of Sierra Vista in which the base library would be operated by the city as a branch library. The city hired a library consultant to study the potential partnership and estimate costs. The cost of the partnership was estimated to be much more than the current operating costs of the base library (which has been operating below the Army's General Library Program standards). Ultimately, the Fort Huachuca leadership decided the partnership was not workable, considering their goal was to cut costs.

Despite these findings in 2006, the base leadership decided to close the Fort's library. Soldiers and their families will be forced to use the Sierra Vista city library. It is unfortunate that the base leadership did not decide to invest in their own base library (which was operating at an economical cost, albeit below Army standards, compared to what library services would cost if they were purchased from the city). The base library collection, which has many valuable and irreplaceable materials collected since 1879, will be advertised to other federal libraries. Sadly, leadership decided to close the library without discussing this with or surveying the stakeholders—the soldiers and their families; many of whom, learned of the library closing through an article in the city paper.

The Department of Defense categorizes libraries as a "military essential activity." Army libraries are consistently ranked as the number one or two, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation program in the *Survey of Army Families*, the *Sample Survey of Military Personnel*, and the *Leisure Needs Survey*. These ratings reflect more than the need for libraries; they reflect the important role libraries play in creating a sense of community and place. The Army Plan for

2006-2023 for flagship installations includes a long-term focus on making installations quality “Information Hubs.”

In the 1980s, 100 years after the Fort Huachuca Library’s frontier beginnings, the Army recognized the library as the first Army Post Library to acquire and install an automated system to integrate standard library functions. Construction of Fort Huachuca’s current \$1.2 million dollar library was completed in 1987. It houses over a \$1 million worth of books and periodicals and a \$500,000 worth of furnishings, automated equipment, and retrieval systems. Unfortunately, this former cutting-edge and award-winning facility has not been kept up to Army library standards.

According to a January 25, 2007 memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Installations and Environment), partnership between installation libraries and municipalities is “contingent upon submission of quarterly reports . . . [and] on the results of ongoing evaluation of customer satisfaction and assessment of library service performance against library standards.” This leads one to wonder, what happens if the partnership does not work out? It would cost over \$1 million to replace the library’s collection and an undetermined amount to renovate and replace the physical space. The base library’s special collection of Southwest, Native American, and Military History is irreplaceable. If the library is closed, it will be distributed among other federal libraries and lost forever as a resource.

It is also interesting to note that the January 25, 2007 memorandum emphasized the Army’s interest in “customer satisfaction.” The decision to close the base library *without* discussion, surveys or evaluations conducted with soldiers and their families to determine the services they value most and how the closing would affect them appears to violate Army procedure.

According to reports, research, and information the ALA has received from various sources including Fort Huachuca staff, Department of Army staff, City of Sierra Vista Library staff, and concerned citizens, it seems that the Fort Huachuca leadership was mostly interested in reducing costs with complete disregard for the impact of service reductions to Army soldiers, families, and retirees. Instead of recognizing and supporting the Fort Huachuca Library as a valuable resource and source of long-time pride, and taking an opportunity to improve this former award-winning facility to meet current Army standards, the leadership recommended shutting it down.

On several occasions, there was misinformation reported about the Library closing. Some reports indicated that library services by the city were superior to Fort Huachuca’s. However, the Army’s own documentation, along with reports and interviews with individuals from the Fort Huachuca, Army, and City of Sierra Vista, including the City’s Library Director, provide evidence to the contrary. These articles neglected to mention that many of the military network programs offered by the base library will be cut and that there will be no staff at the city library dedicated to the military community.

**In conclusion, we urge the Army leadership to intervene immediately to keep the Fort Huachuca Library open.** Closing the Fort Huachuca Library would be a huge and

irreplaceable loss for the soldiers and their families. Instead, we urge the Army to fund the Library at appropriate levels to meet its own standards and to involve the soldiers and their families in this process of creating the library that this community deserves.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leslie Burger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Leslie Burger  
President

cc: The Honorable Gabrielle Giffords, U.S. Representative, 8<sup>th</sup> District of Arizona  
The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva, U.S. Representative, 7<sup>th</sup> District of Arizona  
The Honorable Duncan Hunter, Ranking Member, U.S. House of Representatives  
Armed Services Committee  
The Honorable Jon Kyl, U.S. Senator, Arizona  
The Honorable Carl Levin, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services  
The Honorable John McCain, U.S. Senator, Arizona; Ranking Member, Senate  
Committee on Armed Services  
The Honorable Ike Skelton, Chairman, U.S. House of Representatives Armed Service  
Committee