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Building the Battle, Losing the War: The Defense Economy, Industrial Capitalism, and the Cold War's Fallout in Alabama's 'Model City'

Denali E. Sagner
University of Pennsylvania, dsagner@sas.upenn.edu

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Building the Battle, Losing the War: The Defense Economy, Industrial Capitalism, and the Cold War's Fallout in Alabama's 'Model City'

Abstract

Throughout the early twentieth century, Anniston, Alabama was a stronghold of military-industrial power in the United States. Due to its beginnings as a planned, industrial city, Anniston easily attracted formidable capital in the soil pipe, textile, and chemical industries, sparking economic and infrastructural development. Concurrently, the establishment of Fort McClellan and the Anniston Army Depot by the United States Army fused the manufacturing powers of the region with the Army's military conquests. Throughout WWI, WWII, and the Cold War years, military brigades such as the Women's Army Corps, Military Police Corps, and Army Chemical Corps trained at McClellan, infusing the local economy with capital through job creation, contracts to local companies, and money spent off-base. Confounding phenomena of U.S. military deescalation in the late Cold War era, deindustrialization in the American manufacturing sector, and the increasingly technological orientation of global warring rendered much of Anniston's economy obsolete by the early 1970s. Despite wide-ranging activism from local boosters and politicians, the end of the twentieth century in Anniston would be marked by factory closings and military downsizing, culminating in the shuttering of Fort McClellan by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) in 1995. This thesis seeks to follow how the military, private corporations, governing bodies, and everyday Americans in Anniston interacted in a political economy driven by capitalist profit incentives and a military industrialism. It seeks, ultimately, to trace Anniston's tumultuous history in order to understand the impacts of the military-industrial complex on everyday American life in the twentieth century.

Keywords

military-industrial complex, base realignment and closure commission, cold war, alabama, chemical weapons, united states army, fort mccllellan, deindustrialization

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | History | Military History | Political History | Social History | United States History

BUILDING THE BATTLE, LOSING THE WAR:
THE DEFENSE ECONOMY, INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM, AND THE COLD WAR'S
FALLOUT IN ALABAMA'S 'MODEL CITY'

Denali Sagner

AN HONORS THESIS

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History

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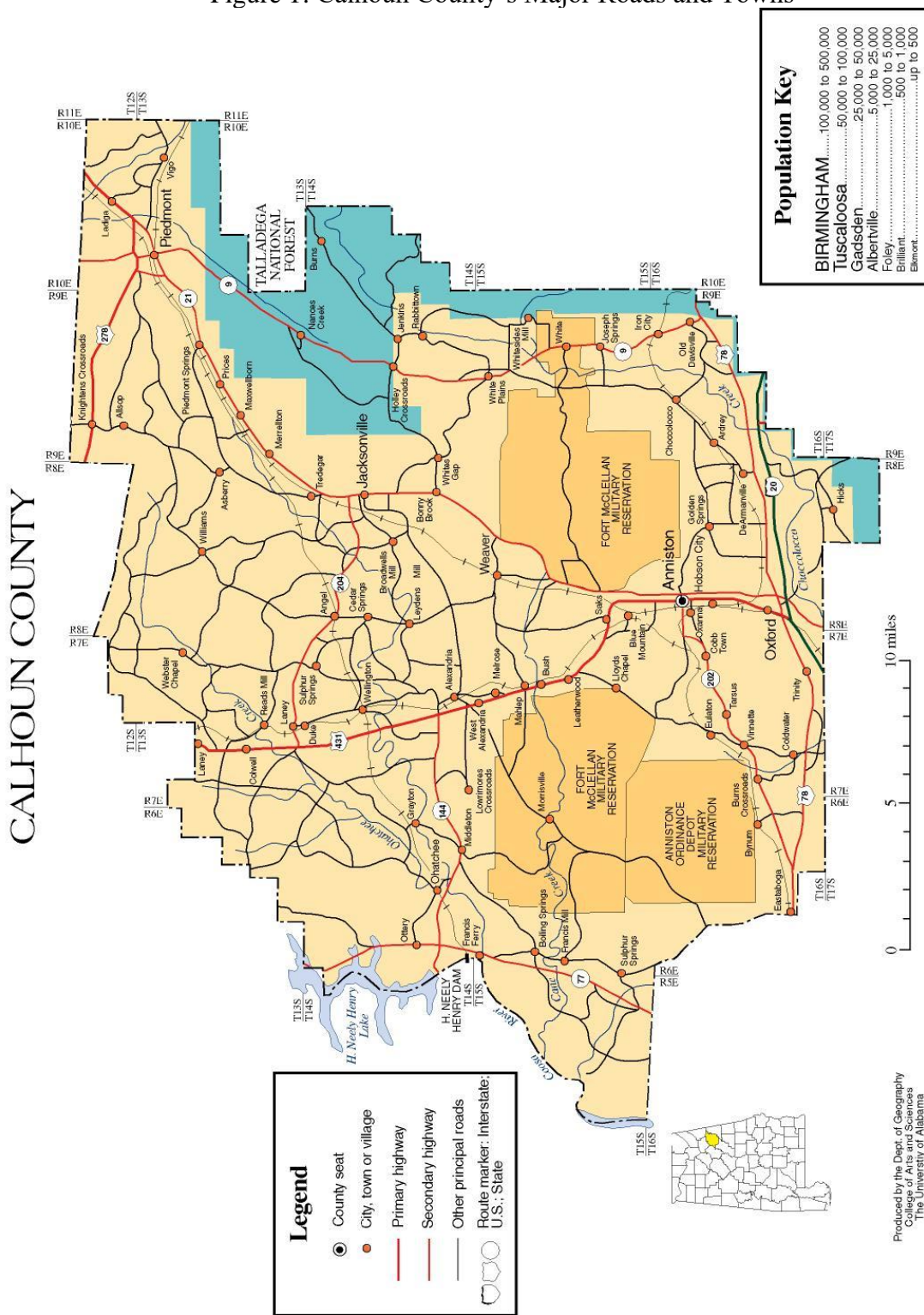
War is too serious a matter to entrust to military men.

– Georges Clemenceau

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Figure 1: Calhoun County's Major Roads and Towns ¹



¹ Alabama Maps, Alabama Maps (Cartographic Research Laboratory, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Alabama), accessed December 16, 2021, <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/contemporarymaps/alabama/counties/calhoun.html>.

Introduction

Anniston, Alabama appears when you least expect it. The drive from Anniston to Birmingham, the closest neighboring metro area, takes about an hour on State Route 20. Deciduous trees and the occasional truck stop mark the highway for miles until, suddenly, they give way to a collection of ubiquitous American chain restaurants and sprawling grids of single-family homes. Anniston's downtown is historic but sleepy. On a balmy Friday afternoon in early July, Noble Street, the city's main business drag, is largely silent, save a few heads popping in and out of the hardware store and local diner. Noble Street's stores are marked with colorful stucco exteriors, 1950's-era striped awnings, and neon signs. Each business brandishes a large American flag. Interspersed between Rexall Drugs, Effina's Italian restaurant, and CD Cellar Music are "For Rent" signs on shuttered storefronts and office buildings. The geography of the city is breathtaking. From Noble Street, one is surrounded on all sides by the deep greens of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a geological barrier which seems to insulate Anniston from the outside world.

Anniston is a small city of about 21,000 residents situated in Alabama's northeast corner. On its face, the town feels like many others that dot the sprawling landscape of the American South. It centers around the charming, yet run-down, mixed-use strip of Noble Street, untouched by the urban renewal that bulldozed many larger cities in the late twentieth century. It is diverse but remains segregated, informed by a long and contentious history of racial injustice.² White-picket fences surround split-level colonial homes on the more prosperous east side—keeping some in,

² On May 14, 1961, a mob of white residents famously firebombed a Greyhound bus of Freedom Riders in Anniston who were campaigning for the desegregation of public buses.

See Phil Noble's *Beyond the Burning Bus: The Civil Rights Revolution in a Southern Town* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2013) and Mia Bay's "Traveling for Freedom: The Desegregation of American Transportation," in *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021).

and others out. Large cement buildings house industrial plants and assembly lines—though fewer remain functioning than thirty years prior. It is undeniably Christian and unabashedly American—eighteen churches host worship services on Sundays in the immediate vicinity of downtown Anniston, alone.

The history of Anniston, though, resounds with complexities hidden far below the surface of Noble Street's diners and drug stores. Years before this quiet afternoon in July, the city was a bustling regional center for military operations and industrial production. In the mid-20th century, Anniston's industrial landscape was marked by dozens of plants which manufactured chemicals, iron pipes, and textiles. Intertwined with Anniston's industrial economy was its military presence in the form of the Anniston Army Depot and Fort McClellan, a sprawling Army base located in the city's northeast corner. At its height during the early Cold War years, McClellan trained tens of thousands of soldiers at a time, namely those in the Women's Army Corps, Military Police Corps, Army Chemical Corps, Military Police School, and National Guard. Annistonians became accustomed to the ubiquity of uniformed soldiers in downtown cafes, churches, supermarkets, and residential cul-de-sacs. The local economy thrived, as military personnel spent their dollars in town and Anniston's residents brought home comfortable middle-class incomes from manufacturing jobs in industrial plants and support jobs at Fort McClellan. In 1951 alone, the United States Secretary of Defense requested \$29 million to be allocated for developing McClellan—capital that would trickle into the regional economy in the form of civilian personnel hired, construction projects acquired by local contractors, and the development of facilities available for public use.³

³ Letter from the Alabama Congressional delegation, June 20, 1952, Box 186, Folder 132, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

In the post-WWII years, however, sweeping changes in American geopolitics would begin to chip away at this once prosperous landscape. Alongside a massive downsizing in Anniston's industrial sector, the end of the Vietnam War and the development of new tactics for streamlining costs and efficiency in war-making would land at Fort McClellan's front door. In 1969 and 1970 alone, the Department of Defense cut 90 civilian and 678 military jobs from the base.⁴ As the United States moved largely to a world driven by machines, computerized warfare, and outsourced labor, Anniston's history as a center for traditional manufacturing and Army training left it unable to compete. In 1995, this economic decline reached an inflection point, when the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) voted to shutter the formidable Fort McClellan. The closing of the base brought with it rampant unemployment, small business closures, and a loss of identity for a city historically intertwined with the business of defense. As Phillip Tutor, former columnist at *The Anniston Star*, the city's local paper, explained, "Anniston's economy ostensibly was based on two things: federal contracts to the military and heavy industry like pipe shops and iron shops. What happened over time is the military left and then technology changed to where those pipe shops all closed. So, Anniston's economy got screwed."⁵ Years later, Annistonians would come to discover that two of the industries which had been keeping them alive—chemical manufacturing and defense—had slowly been killing them, dispersing toxic chemicals into the air, land, and water for decades.⁶

⁴ "678 Jobs Lost At McClellan; No Details Given," *The Anniston Star*, March 5, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115177497/>, "50 Civilians Get Dismissal Slips At Fort," *The Anniston Star*, January 10, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/116089883/>

⁵ Phillip Tutor, interview by Denali Sagner, June 16, 2021, Anniston, Alabama.

⁶ For more on chemical contamination in Anniston see "Monsanto Poisoned This Alabama Town — And People Are Still Sick" by Harriet Washington, *Baptized in PCBs: Race, Pollution, and Justice in an All-American Town* by Ellen Griffith Spears, and *My City Was Gone: One American Town's Toxic Secret, Its Angry Band of Locals, and a \$700 Million Day in Court* by Dennis Love.

This thesis seeks to follow Anniston through its long history as a town built up, and then brutally abandoned by, the all-powerful forces of American industry and military might. Anniston's story brings to light the ways in which the military, private corporations, local, state, and federal governing bodies, and everyday Americans interact in a political economy driven by capitalist profit incentives and a mission to show military power on the world's stage. Anniston's early industrial development distinguished it in the rural South in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, helping it attract critical military investment, mainly through developments at Fort McClellan. By the 1970s, however, these same industries which had once bolstered Anniston's economy—both civilian and military—would serve as its downfall. Deindustrialization in the American manufacturing sector, military de-escalation in the post-Vietnam War era, and a shifting orientation towards technology-heavy and personnel-light forms of defense spending pushed budget cuts and plant closures in the Anniston area over the course of three decades. As geopolitical changes threatened the livelihoods of Annistonians, local boosters engaged in wide-ranging activism, capitalizing on arguments of national security, local economics, and government pragmatism to attempt to retain the military installation at the center of their economy. Nonetheless, the 20th century in Northeast Alabama culminated in the Army "Hanging out the 'closed' sign at Fort McClellan."⁷ What would follow would be years marked by political and economic uncertainty, as the small municipality was left to contend with rampant unemployment and the redevelopment of a contaminated base.

Through Anniston's story, this thesis will highlight the inextricable connection between the American defense economy and modern deindustrialization, and, more specifically, the unsustainable nature of American war-making as a business venture for small towns. This study

⁷ "Hanging out the 'closed' sign at Ft. McClellan," *The Anniston Star*, June 29, 1995

will examine how while some Southern regions ascended via military and technological development in the Cold War era, others, like Anniston, remained tethered to dying industries, losing out high-tech research and development-oriented economic opportunities. It will also examine the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, evaluating the micro-level local impacts of the federal process on the community surrounding Fort McClellan. While Anniston presents a local case study, the takeaways from its history speak to broader political and economic trends for military towns.

The crux of Anniston’s tumultuous—and ultimately fatal—relationship with the United States Army lays in the machinations of the “military–industrial complex” (MIC). Famously coined by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his 1961 farewell address, the term has come to encompass the inextricable connection between American legislators, the Department of Defense, and private companies who profit from the business of war.⁸ Scholarship on the MIC and its function in the American economy is vast. In *Destructive Creation: American Business and the Winning of World War II*, Mark Wilson discusses the indispensable role of federal policy in cementing the MIC in the WWII era. In efforts to mobilize for the Second World War, the federal government turned increasingly to the private sector to manufacture necessary armaments to defeat global fascism. Wilson describes this “destructive creation” as the process of the fruitful building up of the domestic economy through the construction of deadly weapons. This required not only the participation of private companies, but the development of an enduring structure of government-imposed price controls, supply chain management, and public-private

⁸ “President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address,” Our Documents - President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address (1961) (OurDocuments.gov, January 17, 1961), <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=90>.

partnerships. As Wilson writes, World War II marked an era in which the American economy was “harnessed for the purpose of annihilating its enemies”⁹

Michael Brenes’ *For Might and Right: Cold War Defense Spending and the Remaking of American Democracy* and Ann Markusen, Scott Campbell, Peter Hall, and Sabina Deitrick’s *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America*, discuss the longevity of the military-industrial complex introduced by Wilson into the post-WWII era. As World War II gave way to a new domestic economy, one deeply embedded in the business of war-making, the “Cold War coalition” was born, Brenes writes. This political coalition—comprised of defense employees, local boosters, military contractors, and local, state, and national politicians—understood the profitability of defense for municipalities across the country. Through wide-ranging lobbying, these actors demanded increased spending both on military bases and in public-private contracts, in hopes that expenditures would facilitate economic development in their own municipalities. Brenes explains how military pork-barreling—the practice of legislators and boosters soliciting large defense projects in their own regions in order to garner financial rewards—became synonymous with development in the Cold War years.

Rise of the Gunbelt discusses how defense contracting and pork-barrel politics helped to remap the United States entirely, infusing some regions with disproportionate funding while leaving others impoverished. The authors examine the “complex chain of structural causes and choices made by various public- and private-sector parties” which facilitated and cemented the importance of the MIC in American political life, helping to contextualize how some Southern municipalities were able to ascend in the midst of Anniston’s decline.¹⁰ *Rise of the Gunbelt*

⁹ Mark Wilson, *Destructive Creation: American Business and the Winning of World War II* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 4.

¹⁰ Ann Markusen, et. al, *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5.

establishes important historical context for how and why traditional Army-centric forms of warfare and weapons development faded into irrelevance as high-tech, aerospace capabilities harbored by military branches like Air Force gained a new, immutable importance.

Important in studying Anniston's arc throughout the twentieth century is not just a foundational understanding of the military-industrial complex, but a specific analysis of how the MIC helped to build the American South. No work is more quintessential in studying these developments than Bruce Schulman's *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South 1938–1980*. Schulman chronicles how defense investments in military bases and public-private contracts helped bring the Southern United States from a sprawling landscape of rural agriculture to a high-tech center of defense innovation. Due to its moderate climate, vast expanses of open land, low tax burdens, and weak labor union regulations, defense contractors eagerly set up shop below the Mason-Dixon Line throughout the Cold War years. Military investment connected the South via interstate highways, funded the development of impressive research universities like Rice University in Houston, Texas and the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, infused much-needed capital into local economies, and spurred job creation.

Yet, more notably, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt* highlights the way in which federal defense funding in the South was “designed not so much to uplift poor people as to enrich poor places.”¹¹ Military-industrial expansion in the South—and more specifically, in Anniston—tethered cities and towns to volatile cycles of boom and bust, which brought money into defense towns when war occurred, and left them destitute when peace reigned. Defense funding constructed impressive infrastructure and enriched those powerbrokers who courted its investment. Its

¹¹ Bruce J Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), xii.

impacts for rank-and-file workers, however, were sparse and fleeting. Even when funding was prosperous, its manifestations for poor and working-class Americans were largely limited to the salaries provided by minimum wage jobs. The presence of military bases and the proliferation of contracts with the military, too, arrested regional development, as defense-oriented municipalities depended on business from their largest—and sometimes only—customer, the United States Armed Forces. When the federal government ultimately voted to shutter Anniston’s Fort McClellan in 1995, “poor people” remained in a region once uplifted by defense spending. “That much of the sunbelt South shivers still in the dark cold of poverty was no oversight,” Schulman writes “but rather the consequence—sometimes intentional, often unintentional—of a set of policies.”¹²

In addition to the impacts of military development on the South, this study is grounded in the vast body of literature surrounding post-war deindustrialization in the American manufacturing sector. Political economist Barry Bluestone’s “Deindustrialization and Unemployment in America” in Paul Staudohar and Holly Brown’s book, *Deindustrialization and Plant Closure*, lays out a theoretical framework through which one can understand the shifts that pushed industry out of Anniston in the late twentieth century. The ascendance of international markets like Japan, Western Europe, and Mexico in the 1960s and 70s posed a threat to American production, slashing the profits of American industrial giants as the U.S. began importing more than it exported. With this, corporations began to seek cost-cutting measures, moving operations abroad to avoid domestic taxes and powerful American unions which demanded fair wages, safe working conditions, and benefits for employees. Additionally, as Bluestone writes, as the manufacturing sector shrunk—namely, in this case study, the soil pipe, textile, and chemical

¹² Bruce J Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), xii.

factories that marked Anniston—the high-tech sector grew. This lifted up businesses which, due to computerization and automation, required fewer and higher-skilled workers. The downsizing of employment opportunities for low-skilled workers in industrial towns like Anniston did not give way to new opportunities in the high-tech sector. Rather, many low-wage workers were left unemployed or funneled into similarly low-paying roles elsewhere. In Anniston, a community not just home to, but dependent on, antiquated industries, the closing of cast-iron soil pipe foundries and other factories meant a shrinking tax base and deteriorating public goods. As Bluestone writes, “the costs of unemployment [went] far beyond the loss of income.”¹³

The crux and culmination of this study lies in the 1995 Base Realignment and Closure Commission’s decision to shut down Anniston’s Fort McClellan. While not as vast as the literature surrounding the military-industrial complex and deindustrialization—as BRAC is a relatively green process—literature has begun to emerge about the politics and implications of the base closure method. David S. Sorenson’s *Shutting Down the Cold War: The Politics of Military Base Closure* provides detailed explanatory context on the emergence of base closure legislation, the inner workings of the 1991, 1993, and 1995 BRAC rounds, and theoretical understandings of federal base closure decision making. Sorenson seeks to connect base closure with larger patterns of defense de-escalation, as “the base-closure issue was but a microcosm of the larger impact of defense reductions after the Cold War.”¹⁴ Michael Touchton and Amanda J. Ashley’s *Salvaging Community: How American Cities Rebuild Closed Military Bases* brings Anniston’s history into the present day, outlining how cities suffering from base closures are forced to contend with confounding issues of chemical contamination, convoluted land transfers,

¹³ Barry Bluestone, “Deindustrialization and Unemployment in America,” in *Deindustrialization and Plant Closure* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), 6.

¹⁴ David S. Sorenson, *Shutting Down the Cold War: The Politics of Military Base Closure* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 1.

and cooperation between the Department of Defense and state and local governments. While military base closure is a phenomenon with historical roots, its impacts are strikingly contemporary. Not only do Touchton and Ashley outline the political history of BRAC, but they also offer “a foundation that practitioners working in former military communities can use to improve redevelopment performance and salvage failing communities.”¹⁵ Anniston, in many ways, is one such community.

In addition to broader scholarly works discussing the national and regional implications of the MIC and the decline of American industry, this thesis relies heavily on the testimonies of the very people who lived through Anniston’s rise, and ultimate fall. Two important books by local scholars focus largely on Anniston’s storied history with toxic chemicals. *Baptized in PCBs: Race, Pollution, and Justice in an All-American Town* by University of Alabama historian Ellen Griffith Spears, chronicles Anniston’s journey from an idyllic pre-industrial community to “an iconic site of toxic contamination.”¹⁶ Spears’ work focuses on the chemical contamination wrought by multinational industrial giants in Anniston’s plants (namely the Monsanto Chemical Corporation), as well as the chemical warfare training at Fort McClellan and the incineration of chemical weapons at the Anniston Army Depot. *Baptized in PCBs* highlights Anniston’s damaging dependency on toxic industries, resulting in a catch-22 between “poison or poverty,” in which Anniston found itself left with both.¹⁷

My City Was Gone: One American Town's Toxic Secret, Its Angry Band of Locals, and a \$700 Million Day in Court by journalist Dennis Love follows the stories of three local actors in

¹⁵ Michael Touchton and Amanda J. Ashley, *Salvaging Community How American Cities Rebuild Closed Military Bases* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 3.

¹⁶ Ellen Griffith Spears, *Baptized in PCBs: Race, Pollution, and Justice in an All-American Town* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

their upbringing in the city and their political battle for the safe incineration of the Anniston Army Depot's chemical stockpile. Like Spears, Love grounds his contemporary storytelling in historical background surrounding Anniston's relationship with the global economy and the United States Army. While his work is largely journalistic, Love offers a historical base for why and how Anniston—in an unending quest for capital—became a notable site of toxic contamination at the hands of military industry.

These books—along with most other literature on Anniston—focus almost entirely on the issues of PCB contamination by Monsanto and the incineration of chemical weapons at the Army Depot. While these are indispensable events in the history of the city, this study seeks rather to center Fort McClellan in how Anniston attracted, and then lost, its military-industrial economic lifeline. Chemical warfare has an important place in Fort McClellan's history—as McClellan hosted the Army Chemical Corps training program—but it is not the center of this story, as it is in the aforementioned works.

In addition to Spears and Love's books, this research relies on oral history interviews conducted with Annistonians in the summer of 2021, archival materials such as letters, government documents, and Congressional records, as well as decades of newspaper articles from *The Anniston Star*, Calhoun County's prominent local newspaper. While secondary literature establishes a critical framework for understanding the phenomena that defined Anniston over the twentieth century, the impacts of these changes on the ground cannot be understood absent of the voices of those who worked in blue-collar jobs at the Fort, sent their children to local schools, and broke bread with the soldiers who passed in and out of town. For while the Army swiftly packed up and moved out when economic downsizing led to base closure

in 1995, Anniston’s factory workers, small business owners, teachers, parents, and retirees were left to shoulder the burden of rapid and all-encompassing disinvestment.

Chip Howell sits in a booth at Cane Creek Golf Course, an 18-hole range built on the former site of Fort McClellan. McClellan has not belonged to the Army in decades, yet its long history as a beacon of military power in the region is not lost on any visitor. Empty barracks and Spanish style colonial office buildings still stand, battered by years of negligence and Alabama weather. Abandoned training facilities hide behind overgrown bushes and barbed wire. Cane Creek Golf Course was once a part of the military’s sprawling presence, hosting tournaments for soldiers and civilians alike looking to recreate on the base. Today, it is a public facility owned by the city of Anniston—one of the few successful operations yielded from the long and contentious process of McClellan’s redevelopment.

Chip Howell served as Anniston’s mayor from 2000 to 2008 and oversaw much of the redevelopment processes, as well as the incineration of the U.S. Army’s chemical stockpile at the Army Depot and a \$300 million chemical contamination lawsuit against Monsanto.¹⁸ After eight eventful years at the helm of the city, Howell describes city politics as a “full contact sport.”¹⁹ Every face that enters the clubhouse greets Howell—some with a wave, others with the latest report from a local business. It’s a small town, and Howell is all but a celebrity.

Anniston is steeped in its own history, and more broadly, in the history of a post-war and post-industrial nation in flux. Yet years after the defense economy that once marked Northeast

¹⁸ Harriet Washington, “Monsanto Poisoned This Alabama Town - And People Are Still Sick,” BuzzFeed News. BuzzFeed News, July 26, 2019, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/harrietwashington/monsanto-anniston-harriet-washington-environmental-racism>.

¹⁹ Chip Howell, interview by Denali Sagner, July 2, 2021, Anniston, Alabama.

Alabama's landscape has faded into the recesses of Anniston's collective memory, the impacts of its absence remain. This is a reality Howell knows intimately. He calls the shuttering of Anniston's industrial economy "A slow death by a thousand cuts."²⁰ "[Industry left] during the seventies and the eighties," he says, "By the early nineties, it was gone." Notably contentious in his eight-year tenure was the battle over the redevelopment of Fort McClellan after the Army's withdrawal, a process that remains unsettled. "We had thousands of acres, but we did not have probably more than ten or fifteen that we could put together," he says of efforts to repurpose the Fort. "You can't attract economic development that way... There are landfills, there's still contamination, there are groundwater issues being constantly maintained."

Anniston's dual struggles with the loss of both its Fort and its industrial base resonates on the ground today. When adjusted for inflation, Annistonians boasted a median household income of \$41,236 in 1960.²¹ In 2019, that number had dropped to \$36,051.²² Acres of Fort McClellan remain untouched, as chemical contamination renders them unsuitable for residential and commercial use. Cycles of poverty, disinvestment, and deindustrialization have followed the region through the twenty-first century. "I challenge any community to go through one of the things we went through, much less all three," Howell says somberly.²³

This study seeks to situate Anniston's contemporary problems in its historical progression from a model of military-industrial success to a victim of the long BRAC process, accelerated by American deindustrialization. Understanding the history of Northeast Alabama offers insight not

²⁰ Chip Howell, interview by Denali Sagner, July 2, 2021, Anniston, Alabama.

²¹ 1960 Census of Population: Supplementary Reports, United States Department of Commerce, John T. Connor. PC(S1)-48, Washington, D.C., July 30, 1965. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1960/pc-s1-supplementary-reports/pc-s1-48.pdf> (December 14, 2021)

²² "Anniston, Alabama." U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts. United States Census Bureau. Accessed December 15, 2021. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/annistoncityalabama/PST045219>.

²³ Chip Howell, interview by Denali Sagner, July 2, 2021, Anniston, Alabama.

only into the contemporary problems of one small town, but into the ever-changing relationship between capitalist industry, the United States military, and the American citizen.

CHAPTER 1:

Building Anniston: “Destructive Creation” in Alabama’s “Model City”

Anniston, Alabama’s history begins—and ends—with its manufacturing sector. In 1872, industrialists Samuel Noble and Daniel Tyler relocated to Alabama’s northeast corner for its favorable climate and abundance of iron ore, signing a business contract that established the Woodstock Iron Company in the new town of Woodstock, Alabama. After learning that another Woodstock already existed in the region, they renamed the town for Tyler’s daughter-in-law, Annie: Annie’s town, or Anniston.²⁴

In the late 1800’s, Woodstock Iron Company began planning out Anniston as a private, enclosed municipality. Tyler and Noble’s Anniston offered higher wages and better housing options than many other industrial towns of its kind. Woodstock Iron constructed public parks, a sewage system, churches, schools, and a company store. Residents could live in comfortable cottages on quarter-acre plots of land, complete with space for fruit and vegetable gardens. Because the city was closed to the public, residents were not plagued with overpopulation and resource scarcity. The town brought in millions of dollars and was heralded as a success story in the underdeveloped South. In 1882, the *Atlanta Constitution* wrote of the town, “Indeed I do not know of more than one town in the union of the character that bears a greater importance on its very face as Anniston. Much has been written about it, but nothing has appeared in any prints that gives a satisfactory idea of the magnificence of the enterprise.”²⁵

²⁴ Gary Sprayberry, “Anniston,” Encyclopedia of Alabama, February 14, 2008, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1464>.

²⁵ C T L, “Anniston: The Wonderful Alabama Town, Its Industries and Enterprising Owners.,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 26, 1882, p. 4, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/historical-newspapers/anniston/docview/494833563/se-2?accountid=14707>., Chip

This thesis is not a study of Anniston's beginnings, nor of Noble and Tyler's Woodstock Iron Company. Yet understanding Anniston from its inception helps contextualize its ascendance—and subsequent decline—as a regional leader in industrial production and military strength. Anniston's foundations as a planned manufacturing city allowed it to rise above much of the rural, underdeveloped South in the early twentieth century, ultimately making it a leader in cast-iron soil pipe production. This success helped it to court military funding in the form of expansions at the Army's Fort McClellan, as the military saw use in the area's distinguished industrial capabilities. With a formidable manufacturing sector and a lively military base, the Anniston area developed vibrant residential communities, strong public works programs, and became a sought-after home for families, military and civilian alike. Despite the success of Fort McClellan, the volatile nature of the military business made it such that actors in Anniston lobbied passionately and continuously for increased funding at the Fort from its foundations. Gains made due to increased spending during wartime waned in eras of peace, revealing an unstable dependency on the military economy which would define Anniston for decades. This chapter will follow the concurrent development of Anniston's manufacturing sector and the military's presence at Fort McClellan during the first half of the twentieth century, examining how the two were inextricably linked and came to define the region's political economy.

With the construction of the Georgia Pacific Railroad line, which connected Atlanta, Georgia and Birmingham, Alabama via Anniston, Noble and Tyler's closed community opened to

Howell, interview by Denali Sagner, July 2, 2021, Anniston, Alabama., H. Hugh Floyd and M. Ryan Floyd, "Modernity and Anniston's Transformation from 'Model City' to 'Toxic Town,'" *The Alabama Review* 69, no. 3 (July 2016): pp. 217-250, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A473923888/AONE?u=upenn_main&sid=summon&xid=238cc0ac, 220-223.

outsiders in 1883.²⁶ Capital began pouring in at unprecedented levels shortly after. Not only did bright-eyed hopefuls come to the “Model City” to participate in the iron and pipe industries, but they also established drug stores, greengrocers, dry goods shops, banks, and newspapers. The flourishing industrial economy soon gave way to supporting businesses providing food, medical care, housing, and leisure to industrial workers. Each train that stopped in town brought dozens of newcomers.²⁷ Woodstock Iron Company was soon joined by Noble and Tyler’s Anniston Manufacturing Company, the Hercules Pipe Company, and the Anniston Pipe & Foundry Company.²⁸ By 1887, Anniston boasted thirty-seven corporations with a capital value of over eleven million dollars.²⁹

Anniston’s explosive development came from its new standing as one of Alabama’s leaders in industrial production. The Anniston-based Alabama Pipe Company, just one of the many manufacturers in town, produced nearly a quarter of the nation’s cast-iron sewer pipe by the 1940s.³⁰ This development facilitated national notoriety and newfound prosperity for local residents, as the *New York Times* described in 1887. The *Times* wrote,

Handsome roadways and grades streets crossed and recrossed; beautiful lawns sloped on the hill sides; neat and comely cottages as pretty as any you’ll find in our own New-York suburbs where the work folk live, clustered in the valley; schoolhouses and churches, water works, shade trees, and pavements, and stores, and even an opera house for the public enjoyment were there.³¹

²⁶ “Atlanta to Anniston: Trains to Run Between the Two Points To-Morrow,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 14, 1883, p. 1, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/historical-newspapers/atlanta-anniston/docview/494885652/se-2?accountid=14707>.

²⁷ “Anniston, Alabama: A stirring town—the rush of people for homes and investments,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 24, 1883, p. 4, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/historical-newspapers/anniston-alabama/docview/494872113/se-2?accountid=14707> (accessed August 5, 2021).

²⁸ Sprayberry, “Anniston,” 2008.

²⁹ Floyd and Floyd, “Modernity and Anniston’s Transformation from ‘Model City’ to ‘Toxic Town,’” (2016), 226.

³⁰ Sprayberry, “Anniston,” 2008.

³¹ “A City for a Monument: The gift of a Yankee hero to the South. Prosperous Anniston, the ideal town that Gen. Dan Tyler, of Connecticut, planned in Alabama,” *New York Times*, February 5, 1887, p. 8, <https://www-proquest-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/docview/94538646?pq-origsite=summon&http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/8765>.

While Anniston's early success in production and industry is notable on its own, it becomes even more impressive when examined alongside the rest of the South in the same era. In 1938, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt commissioned the *Report on the Economic Conditions of the South*. The report, presented to the President by the National Emergency Council, described the South's "vast prairies, wooded plains, fertile valleys, and [high] mountains" as invaluable elements of the regional topography.³² Yet, it also labeled the South as "the Nation's No. 1 economic problem."³³ According to the report, the South's long history of inefficient governance and lack of access to technology rendered it unable to turn its abundant natural resources into accessible capital. Thus, the area faced continued poverty, health problems, illiteracy, and inadequate education. The authors wrote, "Lacking industries of its own, the South has been forced to trade the richness of its soil, its minerals and forests, and the labor of its people for goods manufactured elsewhere."³⁴ Roosevelt's advisors who prepared the report offered a one main solution to aid the crippled region: state-imposed industrialization. As the "greatest untapped market in which American businesses can expand most easily," the National Emergency Council saw industrial development as a way to lift millions out of poverty, to capitalize on the rich natural resources of the South, and to feed America's still struggling economy.³⁵

The broad narrative of Southern economic life painted by Roosevelt's advisors serves as a comparative benchmark through which one can understand the remarkable and consequential nature of Anniston's industrial development. In 1938—the same year the *Report on the*

³² "Report on the Economic Conditions of the South," Report on the Economic Conditions of the South § (1938), <https://archive.org/details/reportoneconomic00nati/page/4/mode/2up?ref=ol&view=theater>, 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

³⁵ "Report on the Economic Conditions of the South," (1938), 61., Patricia Waiwood, "Recession of 1937–38," Federal Reserve History, November 22, 2013, <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/recession-of-1937-38>.

Economic Conditions of the South was published—the Southeastern Sand and Gravel Company broke ground on a new concrete pipe manufacturing facility in town, WHMA, a new radio station, broadcast to Annistonians for the first time, and the Styles-Stanley Service Station began pumping Texaco gas into Anniston’s cars.³⁶ Anniston was an undeniable success story, with a regional ascendance owed to the expansion of the city’s private sector. This distinctive industrial development signaled a new potential for growth that would ultimately emerge with the presence of the United States Army.

Fort McClellan, Anniston’s military base, would serve as the foundation for much of its defense economy, which would develop alongside its industrial economy throughout the early 20th century. Originally Camp McClellan, the site was founded seven miles northeast of the city’s center in the wake of the First World War. On May 18, 1917, the front page of *The Anniston Star* proudly declared in bold letters, “Anniston Site Selected for Training Camp: Uncle Sam Will Establish Permanent Training Camp Here for Artillery, Machine Gun and Infantry Target Practice and Army School of Aviation.”³⁷ The paper reported a purchase of 16,000 acres of land by the federal government, which were to be used as a training camp site and range grounds for the artillery, infantry, and machine gun companies of the Army and National Guard. Annistonians understood the economic possibility of military development from McClellan’s foundation. In 1917, *The Star* reported, “Forces have been at work quietly for many months past in the interest of Anniston in securing this big government plum, which will swell the revenues of the city by millions of dollars every year, and which will, in all probability, double the

³⁶ “New Industry Located Here Will Make Pipe,” *The Anniston Star*, November 6, 1938, p. 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115386616/> 1., “Radio Broadcasting Station WHMA Opens with Gala Ceremony.” *The Anniston Star*, November 4, 1938. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115386562/>., “Styles-Stanley Station to Open,” *The Anniston Star*, August 7, 1938, p. 2, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/109565158/>.

³⁷ “Anniston Site Selected for Training Camp,” *The Anniston Star*, May 18, 1917, p. 1.

population of the city and make it the resort, in the South, for the leading military men of the nation.”³⁸ Major construction on the Camp began on July 15, 1917.³⁹ Later that month, 35,000 men were sent to the base, along with trainloads of supplies.⁴⁰ Soon after, McClellan was officially operational.

Anniston’s impressive industrial stature made it a particularly desirable location for the Army, which was employing increasingly advanced warfare tactics. Anniston was a leading regional manufacturer of iron, steel, textiles, and pipes. It was the first city in Alabama to be lighted by electricity and boasted telephone lines as early as 1884, an unprecedented record for the largely poor and rural state.⁴¹ Not only did the vast expanses of untouched land at McClellan offer a prime location for basic training and trench warfare preparation, its proximity to this industrial and technological development allowed it to become a leading site for defense production and for the development of chemical warfare practices.⁴² The early twentieth century would see an explosion of military personnel on the budding base.

McClellan soon became an undeniable economic and cultural fixture in town, cementing Anniston’s transition from an industrial town to a military-industrial town. By the end of 1917, more than 27,000 troops were in active training at the Fort.⁴³ Not long after the Camp’s opening, *The Star* began running a “Camp McClellan Section,” with military-related editorials, news stories about the war and the life of the American soldier, and ads specifically targeted to the

³⁸ “Anniston Site Selected for Training Camp,” *The Anniston Star*, May 18, 1917, p. 1.

³⁹ History of Fort McClellan, Alabama, 1942, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 122, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁴⁰ “Quartermaster Here to Help Maj. Dulin,” *The Anniston Star*, July 24, 1917, p. 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/101483543/?>.

⁴¹ “About Anniston,” The City of Anniston, December 17, 2020, <https://www.anniston.al.gov/about-anniston/>.

⁴² “Alabama's Own: Camp McClellan,” The United States World War One Centennial Commission (United States Foundation for the Commemoration of the World Wars, September 21, 2016), <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/alabama-wwi-blog/1413-camp-mcclellan.html>.

⁴³ Ibid.

troops.⁴⁴ Businessmen in town saw the opportunity in thousands of visitors coming to Anniston and requiring housing, amenities, and education.⁴⁵ As more soldiers and adjacent personnel moved to town, the local economy saw immense growth.

Anniston was not the only site in the South selected for military training during the Great War. As the Army expanded domestic operations to meet increasing security demands, the Southern United States provided a plethora of benefits. The rural expanses of the American South offered the military ample room to fly planes, shoot guns, experiment with explosives, and conduct covert training operations. As David Sorenson writes, the South was the perfect place to “do all of the things that need both space and privacy.”⁴⁶ In 1917 alone, Camp Jackson in South Carolina, Camp Meade in Maryland, Camp Lee in Virginia, and Camp Gordon in Georgia were established. The collection of bases cropping up south of the Mason-Dixon line was no coincidence.

Anniston’s northeast corner where Camp McClellan sat offered the type of quiet, open land desired by the military. Towns like Anniston also limited many possible distractions for the young men in uniform being shipped to them. Rural Alabama isolated soldiers from the unruly civilian world, creating an environment of disciplined isolation.⁴⁷ From its founding in the early twentieth century, the military benefitted from Anniston, and Anniston benefitted in return. Camp McClellan’s importance during the war granted it recommendation by the War Department as a permanent Army post in 1926.⁴⁸ Three years later, it was rechristened as Fort McClellan—the name it would keep until its closing more than seventy years later—and given

⁴⁴ “Camp McClellan Page of the Anniston Evening Star,” *The Anniston Star*, January 25, 1918, p. 2.

⁴⁵ “Need of Houses Realized in City,” *The Anniston Star*, July 17, 1917, pp. 1-5, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/101482396/>, 5.

⁴⁶ Sorenson, *Shutting Down the Cold War*, 10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ “Location at McClellan Selected by Officers for Permanent Army Post,” *The Anniston Star*, May 18, 1926, p. 1.

an official, permanent rank.⁴⁹ When the country shortly demobilized from the Great War, however, the base was put on deactivated status.

Around the same time, prompted by the devastation of the Great Depression, the Roosevelt administration began to use the New Deal to spur much of the necessary development outlined in the *Report on the Economic Conditions of the South*. The administration saw federally imposed development programs as a crucial way to provide economic stimulation to the South and to create the industrialization the National Emergency Council had named as the solution to the region's woes. Roosevelt allotted \$820 million to Alabama alone between 1933 and 1939, investing in programs from reforestation by the Civilian Conservation Corps to the construction of 21,000 miles of roads via the Works Progress Administration.⁵⁰ Anniston's own federal court house was expanded through such New Deal funds in 1934.⁵¹

Yet, many Annistonians remained wary of such programs, seeing them as a totalitarian imposition of Northern power on a state still largely grounded in the Confederate-era ideology of "states' rights." In August 1936, *The Star* reported Annistonians calling the New Deal "tending toward a dictatorship" and operated by "radicals" in Washington, D.C.⁵²

Anniston's resistance to federally imposed New Deal programs had roots in its history as a planned industrial town with deeply embedded racial segregation. Anniston had long boasted a sizable Black population—especially as the end of slavery gave way to massive migrations of previously-enslaved people across the South, settling in towns where low-skilled wage labor was

⁴⁹ Sprayberry, "Anniston," 2008.

⁵⁰ Don C. Reading, "New Deal Activity and the States, 1933 to 1939," *The Journal of Economic History* 33, no. 4 (1973): 792–810, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2116786>. Matthew L Downs, "New Deal in Alabama," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, March 26, 2015, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/Article/h-3663>.

⁵¹ "Federal Building and Courthouse Extension - Anniston, AL," *Living New Deal* (University of California Berkeley, April 12, 2017), <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/federal-building-courthouse-extension-anniston-al/>.

⁵² "Mr. Tyler Comes Back" and "Radicals Singing New Tune," *The Anniston Star*, August 9, 1936, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115381961/>

bountiful. By 1900, 40 percent of Anniston's population was Black. Yet despite the bounty of industrial wage labor available in town, life for Black families was far from equal to that of white families. As Ellen Spears writes, "paternalistic industrialism reinforced racial hierarchy" in Anniston.⁵³ Black workers were assigned the most hazardous jobs in iron foundries, Black families were relegated to "Smokey Row," one of the city's most polluted streets, and Black homes, despite being located in the soil pipe capital of the United States, were seldom furnished with sewer lines.⁵⁴

Anniston's economic development model—one that was entirely planned and implemented by private-sector capitalist powerbrokers—allowed for such segregation and abuse of the city's Black population. From its inception, giants like Woodstock Iron delineated not only the machinations of their own corporation, but also controlled the economic workings and spatial planning of the city at large. With this, Black Annistonians could easily be exploited for their labor, yet relegated to the margins of residential and community life. This can be specifically credited to Anniston's unique history as a privately-planned community.

Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, in many ways, threatened this segregated society Anniston's leaders had built. Programs designed to curb Southern poverty like the Works Progress Administration, Public Works Administration, and Farm Security Administration helped, in part, reduce the abject destitution which had long haunted Black descendants of formerly enslaved people.⁵⁵ Additionally, Roosevelt spoke out against lynching and brought Black leaders to the White House to advise the administration on various matters. It is important to note, certainly, that Roosevelt was far from a civil rights hero. The President remained reluctant to explicitly

⁵³ Spears, *Baptized in PCBs*, 23.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-27.

⁵⁵ William E Leuchtenburg, "Franklin D. Roosevelt: The American Franchise," Miller Center (University of Virginia, July 24, 2018), <https://millercenter.org/president/fdroosevelt/the-american-franchise>.

endorse civil rights and anti-lynching legislation throughout his presidency. Moreover, many New Deal programs, distributed on local levels by racially exclusionary government officials, did more to give white Americans an advantage over their Black counterparts than to mitigate structural racism.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, leaders in Anniston feared the influence of a federally stimulated program that could disrupt the racial and economic hierarchy that kept the town's manufacturing sector in successful operation. As Spears writes, even for white workers, Anniston functioned such that laborers received regionally exceptional benefits in exchange for "loyalty and strict adherence to discipline."⁵⁷ Rejecting New Deal development, and instead continuing to rely on private industry, allowed Anniston to evade challenges to this structure.

The Army's growing presence at Fort McClellan, too, would become an indispensable economic anchor for the town in place of accepting many New Deal programs. With the onset of World War II, Fort McClellan was promptly reactivated to respond to the threat of fascism. On December 8, 1941, hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, *The Star's* front page read: "U.S. DECLARES WAR: Second World Conflagration Becomes Reality As Congress Quickly Passes War Declaration." Days later, McClellan's troops were dispatched abroad.⁵⁸ On December 14, the 13th Infantry of the 33rd Division, Camp Forest, Tennessee arrived at McClellan.⁵⁹

As had World War I, World War II proved profitable for the local economy, both on and off the base. Amidst the terror of the war, *The Star* declared Anniston's prospects for 1942 the "brightest in [the] history of the city."⁶⁰ Deposits in local banks rang up to \$12.8 million at the

⁵⁶ For more on the inequitable racial distribution of New Deal benefits, see Ira Katznelson's *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005).

⁵⁷ Spears, *Baptized in PCBs*, 23.

⁵⁸ "Additional Troops Put on Guard Duty," *The Anniston Star*, December 10, 1941, p. 1.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/115175515>

⁵⁹ "27th Division Ready to Move Out from Fort," *The Anniston Star*, December 14, 1941, p. 1.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/115183481>

⁶⁰ "Anniston's Prospects for New Year are Brightest in History of the City," *The Anniston Star*, January 4, 1942, p.

beginning of the year, compared to \$6.95 million three years prior. Plans for the development of power and flood control systems on the Coosa River were on the horizon, along with additional road work. In 1941, improvements in Calhoun County—including substantial construction at McClellan—totaled over \$22 million.⁶¹ The war brought 20,000 officers and soldiers to McClellan, with new classes of young recruits being cycled out every eight weeks. Beyond the Fort's fences, soldiers needed haircuts, groceries, cigarettes, and beer. Civilian jobs began to multiply around the base as more and more troops were shipped in. It was one of the best business years in the city's history—the most important of those businesses being the business of war. In only a few years, McClellan's importance as an economic anchor for the region became indisputable.

The tumultuous nature of war made it such that while Anniston's defense economy was lucrative, it was also unstable. Elites in Anniston were cognizant that the fortunes amassed during the war could disappear as quickly as they emerged. Letters between high-profile Annistonians and U.S. Senator Lister Hill expose this deep-seated concern. Hill served his home state of Alabama both as a U.S. Representative (1923–1938) and a Senator (1938–1969). The Senator championed himself as an advocate for the military at large and for McClellan, which sustained northeast Alabama's economy. Local business leaders, politicians, lawyers, and others wrote frequently and frantically to Hill about the possible closure of the Fort. Various arguments were employed by boosters in advocating to keep the Fort open, many of which drew on new rights-claiming language that emerged in the post-war years. In efforts to advocate for McClellan's continued presence, these actors engaged in discussion of McClellan's positive

1. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115185245>

⁶¹ "Anniston's Prospects for New Year are Brightest in History of the City," *The Anniston Star*, January 4, 1942, p.

1. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115185245>

impact on the city, the losses Anniston would face in the wake of its closure, logistical challenges the Army would face in moving the operation, and national security concerns.

On January 20, 1942, Harry M. Ayers, the editor and publisher of *The Anniston Star*, penned a letter to Hill about the future of McClellan. Ayers was an influential member of the Anniston community and spent years writing to Hill about possible new developments in town. Ayers wrote that McClellan was one of the only two camps in the South without permanent barracks, putting it at a disadvantage to others in the region. For one million dollars the Army could construct the barracks, saving the federal government the cost of building an entirely new camp elsewhere. Ayers closed his letter by writing, “Unless [permanent barracks are built], as previously advised, I doubt very seriously if we will be able to hold a permanent division here after the war is over and without that the additional land that the Army has purchased for an artillery range would be more or less wasted. Moreover, it would probably be necessary for the Alabama troops to train outside the state and that would mean the loss annually to Alabama of several million dollars.” Two days later, the Senator wrote Ayers back: “Certainly, we should do all we can to see that Fort McClellan is made a permanent station after the war has been won!”⁶²

Similar notes flooded in from other important Annistonians. On January 21, Luther B. Liles, a local attorney and businessman, raised his concerns to Senator Hill. By 1942, according to Liles, the United States government had put between sixteen and eighteen million dollars into Fort McClellan. Yet, it seemed probable that if McClellan’s amenities were not improved, it would be put on the Army’s short list for closure. “I am strongly convinced,” Liles wrote, “[that]

⁶² *Correspondence between Harry Ayers and Lister Hill*, 1942, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 122, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

if the War Department sees fit to use McClellan solely as a replacement center we can kiss it goodbye when the emergency is over.”⁶³

While World War II wrought death and destruction both at home and abroad—5,114 Alabamians alone died during the conflict—the letters written by Anniston’s boosters did not shy away from advantages Anniston reaped from “the emergency.”⁶⁴ McClellan’s expansion in the wake of the war brought new residents, infrastructure expansions, and commercial spending, which further developed Anniston into a regional landmark. The benefits of housing an active military base included economic development and increased political power for the city. “Of course it goes without saying,” Liles writes, “that the people of Anniston have a selfish interest in McClellan.”⁶⁵

In many ways, the defense economy in Anniston supplanted many of the social programs which would have been realized by New Deal funding, with far fewer strings attached. As Bruce Schulman writes, federal military investment “forged a new sort of Southern political economy. It permitted the South to pursue development through federal investments, as Southern New Dealers had envisioned, but without the liberal politics of redistributionist economic policy—without support for welfare, labor, or Blacks.”⁶⁶ Black Annistonians continued to face racial subjugation in education, housing, and social programs, even as the Fort’s ascendance allowed for massive development in the local economy. This outcome was no accident—the supplanting of federal welfare with defense funds allowed for this exact evasion of racial equity, enjoyed by white boosters who controlled Anniston’s political economy.

⁶³ *Correspondence between Luther B. Liles and Lister Hill*, 1942, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 122, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁶⁴ “World War II, Korea and Vietnam Casualties Listed by State.” World War II, Korea and Vietnam Casualties Listed by State | U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed August 31, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/html/documents/casualties/stcas.html>.

⁶⁵ *Correspondence between Luther B. Liles and Lister Hill*, Lister Hill Papers.

⁶⁶ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 151.

Hand in hand with the benefits gained through the Fort's presence were the crushing losses of its potential closure. As the war came to an end, rumors grew that McClellan would only serve as a temporary post and be shuttered in the coming years. In October 1944, Fred G. Nunnelley, the Chairman of the Calhoun County Commission, wrote again to Senator Hill.⁶⁷ Nunnelley's letter focused on the losses the region would incur with the Army's retreat. He wrote,

In the event that the War Department does abandon Fort McClellan and the properties adjacent to it purchased for use of training, etc., Pelham Range, consisting of thousands of acres, will be returned to Calhoun County, with all bridges and roads gone, and since the taxes collected in that section fall far short of providing bridges and roads, it will be necessary for us to call upon the Federal Government for anywhere from \$250,000.00 to \$300,000.00 to replace such bridges and roads. We are opposed to such a move.⁶⁸

Not only would McClellan's closure eliminate a major source of income for Anniston, both in federal funding and in income generated by the defense economy's adjacent businesses, but it would also leave the town with the economic burden of acres of unusable land.⁶⁹ As Nunnelley asserted, the federal government handing this land back in its present state would not rectify the abandonment of their major investment. Rather, it would only exacerbate the burden.

Correspondence regarding the Fort touched on the cycle of dependency experienced by cities like Anniston on military development. The more profitable defense became in the WWII years and beyond, the more it anchored Anniston. This economic importance placed on defense, while fruitful in the heyday of war, became a ticking time bomb for the municipalities that remained dependent on it in moments of peace. When war dried up, funds did too. The presence

⁶⁷ "County Chairman Nunnelley Dies in Gadsden Hospital," *The Anniston Star*, September 3, 1949, p. 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/19424828/>

⁶⁸ *Letter from Calhoun County Chairman F. G. Nunnelley*, 1944, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 122, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

of military bases also arrested other types of industrial development and growth, as Anniston relied on Fort McClellan for economic stimulation and social welfare, seeing how prosperous the existing Fort could be, local leaders did not seek out more dynamic industries, but rather continually bolstered McClellan's presence. Installations like McClellan, in many cases, were ultimately harmful for the end game of regional development.⁷⁰ Rather than develop the northeast corner of the city in the realms of modern manufacturing or service, Anniston allowed the Army to purchase tens of thousands of acres of land, developing it solely for military use. While this economic model functioned well in the heyday of Anniston's industrial power, as deindustrialization came to shutter the iron and pipe sectors in the post-war years, Anniston's lack of alternative development during its military height would prove unsustainable.

Much of the rhetoric surrounding the justification for retaining Fort McClellan also revolved around what Anniston's leaders saw as the broader logistical costs of closing McClellan. Here, the onus was directed away from the gains and losses felt by Annistonians, and rather centered on the pragmatism—or lack thereof—of the federal government's decision making. Even while considering Fort McClellan for closure, the U.S. Army engaged in talks of opening brand-new bases elsewhere. In the eyes of many boosters in Anniston, this was a foolish choice, considering the investment which had already been poured into McClellan. As Liles wrote to Senator Hill, "It seems an economic sin for the government to refuse to expend this additional sum and utilize what it already has invested, when to our knowledge they are acquiring new sites where they have no installed water, sewerage, paved streets and other facilities that will cost millions of dollars to build. It is a waste of the taxpayers' money and should not be permitted."⁷¹

⁷⁰ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 150.

⁷¹ *Correspondence between Luther B. Liles and Lister Hill*, Lister Hill Papers.

Alongside this, Anniston's elites began to rally around what they described as the dire national security risks that would accompany McClellan's closure. Nunnelley's letter included a nod to this ideology, which would continue to permeate conversations about base closure for decades. "It will be necessary that a number of permanent posts throughout the United States be retained for security reasons," Nunnelley wrote, "and because of its geographic location, we feel that Fort McClellan is an ideal location for one of those permanent posts."⁷²

For a time after the end of the Second World War, the U.S. military maintained the strength with which it had operated throughout the war years, keeping open many of its domestic bases. While the United States had won the war, it found itself faced with an unstable global climate in the late 1940s, one vulnerable to geopolitical implosion. On July 28, 1946, the *Birmingham News* ran an article on G.I. training at McClellan. Despite being nearly a year out from the end of the war, the base was turning out troop after troop of young soldiers in its eight-week program. McClellan's was the only infantry replacement training center in the nation, where eighteen and nineteen-year-old men received "the same kind of training as through the war was not over." Young soldiers went on to advanced training programs and to various bases, both at home and abroad. Anniston continued to reap the benefits of McClellan's presence, even in peacetime.⁷³

The benefits of missions such as these would not last, however, as the post-war United States began to roll back defense spending and convert industrial production back to civilian functions. Seven months before the *Birmingham News* wrote about McClellan's infantry replacement training, President Harry Truman spoke to the American people via radio broadcast

⁷² Letter from Calhoun County Chairman F. G. Nunnelley, Lister Hill Papers.

⁷³ Jack House, "GI Joe, Jr. At Ft. McClellan Getting Same Training Vets Got During War," *Birmingham News*, July 28, 1946, p. 1.

about the future of the economy in the post-war world. Truman lay out his major goal for the months and years to come: “reconvert our economy from war to peace—as rapidly as possible.”⁷⁴ Many war plants were cleared, defense contracts settled, and factories converted back to peacetime production. Yet, Truman saw a long road ahead in transitioning the economy back to peacetime without losing the gains the war had brought. “While we were producing to meet the needs of war, we had the great stimulus of the war itself. That stimulus is now gone,” Truman declared. And, with the economic uncertainty of this transition, “the reconversion period through which we are now passing has as many elements of danger to our economy as the war period.”⁷⁵

By the early post-War years, the Army began reducing activity at Fort McClellan, a move which would have an immediate impact on the local economy. Damaged hutmments at the base had shown cracks in its infrastructure, making the Fort an easy target for downsizing.⁷⁶ Letters poured into Lister Hill’s office, pleading for the Senator to attempt to save the base. In a long note, Harry Ayers wrote about the constricting pressure of base closure on the town’s economy. Merchants, restauranteurs, labor unions, banks, and other town fixtures were beginning to suffer. According to Ayers’ correspondence, one restaurant owner reported a seventy percent loss of business since the Army began moving troops out of McClellan. John M. Ward, Executive Vice President of the Alabama Chamber of Commerce wrote, “This installation means a great deal to Alabama and we hope very much that something can be done to relieve the situation.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ “Harry S. Truman, Radio Report to the American People on the Status of the Reconversion Program.” The American Presidency Project. U.C. Santa Barbara, January 3, 1946.

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/radio-report-the-american-people-the-status-the-reconversion-program>.

⁷⁵ “Harry S. Truman, Radio Report to the American People on the Status of the Reconversion Program,”

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/radio-report-the-american-people-the-status-the-reconversion-program>.

⁷⁶ *Letter from Harry Ayers to U.S. Secretary of Defense*, 1950, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 131, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁷⁷ *Letter from Harry Ayers to Lister Hill*, October 16, 1946, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 126, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States., *Letter from John M.*

In Anniston, local frustrations over the downsizing of the base soon translated into a wider anger at a federal government that was rolling back so much of the war-related economic stimulus that had sustained the town. On August 4, 1946, *The Star* published an editorial titled “Economizing At Wrong Places.” The article opened with a reference to a speech Truman had made about the necessity to downsize federal expenditures. With the high cost of taxes and the everyday struggle to make ends meet, “hardly any of us will have occasion to find fault with President Truman’s appeal last week for every government department to reduce expenses,” *The Star* reported.⁷⁸ However, Truman’s singling out of the Army and Navy as specific branches in need of expenditure cuts was a foolish and unpatriotic act, according to the paper. *The Star*’s scathing editorial described the immense costs of moving soldiers out of McClellan, the dangerous geopolitical conditions that were “as menacing as they were in 1939,” and the betrayal of America’s valiant soldiers that would occur if military spending were to be cut back. “We never learn anything from the lessons of history,” the article declared.

Despite this unrelenting advocacy on the part of Anniston’s elites, on March 28, 1947, the War Department placed Fort McClellan on inactive status. McClellan’s closure closely followed national trends of military de-escalation. On June 30, 1943, 1.3 million civilians were employed by the War Department. By Feb 28, 1947, the number had dropped to 400,933.⁷⁹ In March, the Department announced that civilian employees in the Army would be reduced by 42,000 more. Many positions were declared “unnecessary as activities have decreased and functions have been eliminated.”⁸⁰ Demobilization had made the business of defense—a major

Ward at AL Chamber of Commerce, August 13, 1946, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 122, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁷⁸ “Economizing At Wrong Places,” *The Anniston Star*, August 4, 1946.

⁷⁹ War Department Press Release: “Army Will Curtail Activities, Cut Workers In U.S. By June 30,” March 28, 1947, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 126, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

player in the economy of Northeast Alabama—a losing one. Harry Truman spoke of reducing the size of the Armed Forces “as fast as possible.”⁸¹ Upon his visit to the now-shuttered McClellan, General Eisenhower insisted that he did not have the personnel to keep the Fort open because the War Department’s funds had been slashed so drastically.⁸² Nearly two years after V-J Day, Harry Truman’s wishes for demobilization were coming true. A press release by the Army announcing base closures read in clear letters: “The following installations will be placed on inactive status as soon as practicable.” The first on the list: “Fort McClellan, Alabama.”⁸³

Community reactions to base closure reflected changes in the way everyday Americans conceived of themselves in the framework of the military state, mainly exhibited through feelings of betrayal and a sense of owed debt by the federal government in the wake of citizens’ patriotic sacrifices. *The Star* wrote that the announcement of McClellan’s closure was “extremely disheartening to the people of this city who have expended so much of their time and treasure in helping to keep America prepared against attack by foreign foes.” Alabama’s legislators “fought the Army’s battles even when it was unpopular to do so” and now have been betrayed by government actors who “think more in terms of votes than of national security.”⁸⁴ Anniston’s citizens had spent decades providing labor to build up the defense economy that was withering before their eyes. Seemingly, their patriotism would not be paid back. As Harry Ayers wrote in a letter to U.S. Representative Samuel Hobbs, who served Alabama from 1935 to 1951,

⁸¹ “Statement by the President on Demobilization,” The American Presidency Project (University of California Santa Barbara, January 8, 1946), <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-president-demobilization>.

⁸² Letter from Hill to C.R. Bell about the shutting down of Ft. McClellan, 1947, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 126, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁸³ War Department Press Release: “Army Will Curtail Activities, Cut Workers In U.S. By June 30,” March 28, 1947, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 126, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁸⁴ “Eisenhower’s Visit Offers Hope,” *The Anniston Star*, March 30, 1947, p. 4. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115188440>

“I personally and practically [believe] all of the people of Anniston and the Alabama Delegation in Congress have cooperated with the Army in every respect,” he wrote, “However, the Army has not kept faith with us in the promise to keep McClellan active.”⁸⁵

Annistonians’ senses of ownership over a piece of the defense economy’s pie can be attributed to the way in which war was made a wide-reaching, national effort in the mid-twentieth century. During World War II, the reach of the American war-making machine expanded far beyond its previous bounds, acting as the most consequential federal program to date. After the devastation of the Great Depression, war offered full employment and infused the economy with a much-needed shock of capital. Public-private contracts fused the missions of the military and American industrial giants, generating millions of dollars in weapons production. Alongside this, various adjacent economies cropped up to support this mission, such the new barber shops, greengrocers, and restaurants that opened for soldiers in Anniston. Additionally, a complete restructuring of the tax code made participation in war-making a compulsory act. With lower tax exemptions to poverty levels and higher marginal tax rates for all income brackets, nearly every American had a literal monetary stake in the outcome of the war.⁸⁶ Simply by participating in the economy, each American was a contributor in the fight against fascism. Consequentially, their investment would not go without an expectation of return.

This collective spirit of mobilization fundamentally altered the relationship between individuals and the state. While it helped to successfully mobilize a large, decentralized federalized populace against an overseas enemy, it also gave citizens a new conception of what was owed to them as Americans and as patriots. Every American—from front-line soldiers to

⁸⁵ Letter from Harry Ayers to Rep. Sam Hobbs, March 28, 1947, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 126, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁸⁶ James T Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 122.

children rationing rubber erasers—reoriented their lives in the 1930s and 40s towards the mission of total war. Being an American became synonymous with receiving employment, income, and welfare from a state at war, in exchange for dedication to the patriotic cause. For Anniston, this came in the form of allotting large swaths of its economy to the war cause, both on the Fort and off, in local factories and defense-adjacent small businesses. It is important to note that the federal government fulfill its promises on some elements of this deal—such as the wide-reaching benefits awarded to American veterans and their families in the form of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, more commonly known as the G.I. Bill. Yet, Anniston's defense economy proved to the local community that other structural benefits at McClellan and in the private sector could be ripped away with the end of the war. Fort McClellan's closure meant economic losses for Anniston and the surrounding area, while also epitomizing this deep sense of betrayal.

Not only did Anniston and the surrounding area lose revenue upon McClellan's closure, but the vacant base also began to attract crime, acting as a cancerous liability on the already struggling city. Four years after the base closed, the neglected site teemed with vandals. "Within one year," Harry Ayers wrote in a letter to Senator Hill, "they probably will have stolen enough Government equipment to have built the model hutments almost out of salvage from the old hutments."⁸⁷ Economic suffering now occurred not just in the Fort's absence, but in its abandoned presence. "McClellan was kept open throughout the Depression and it certainly seems that the Army could keep enough men there now to protect the property," Ayers added. But the Army did not. In the years that followed 1943, a quiet sense of uncertainty floated

⁸⁷ Letter from Harry Ayers, May 19, 1947, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 126, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

through the air in Anniston. Annistonians watched solemnly as the shuttered base collected dust north of town. As quickly as McClellan's fortunes had amassed, they had withered away.

Growing threats from the Soviet Union, however, would soon make post-WWII military demobilization an increasingly impossible reality. In January 1946, President Truman addressed the American people, declaring that demobilization was already slowing due to a critical need for troops overseas. There was now an "inescapable need" for the United States to fulfill "its obligation in this difficult and critical postwar period in which we must devote all necessary strength to building a firm foundation for the future peace of the world."⁸⁸ Truman's Armed Forces saw conflict with communist powers on the horizon, which necessitated a major American military presence abroad. Fort McClellan's operations would be important, once again, in this fight.

Understanding the financial implications of partnerships with the military, Anniston's boosters had never truly ceased in their quest to revitalize the shuttered Fort and redirect lucrative military funding to the city. In May 1947, Senator Hill wrote to C. R. Bell, President of the Commercial National Bank. "I have been in constant contact with the Secretary of War, Judge Patterson, General Eisenhower and other officials of the War Department in my efforts to do everything I possibly can for Fort McClellan," Hill wrote. His main goal, he added, was to secure "as large a payroll as possible there." On October 28, 1949, Arthur H. Lee, president of the Anniston Chamber of Commerce, sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson. In the letter, Lee highlighted the permanent features of Fort McClellan that made it ideal for reopening by the military. These features included "its paved road network, its railroad systems,

⁸⁸ "Statement by the President on Demobilization," The American Presidency Project (University of California Santa Barbara, January 8, 1946), <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-president-demobilization>.

its recreational facilities, its utility systems, its concrete barracks for enlisted men, and the unusually large number of officers' and non-commissioned officers' quarters." Lee contended that opening McClellan back up for military use was largely an issue of financial feasibility, however he urged that due to the preexisting infrastructure at the base, reactivating it would be in the best interest of the Armed Forces.⁸⁹

By the early 1950s, the United States would soon acclimate to this new period of wartime spending in peacetime conditions, a budding manifestation of the MIC's growing presence in American life. In the wake of the Korean War, far-reaching federal defense stimulus programs would come to fund various American manufacturing sectors. In an address to the American people on July 19, 1950, Truman declared that "It is obvious that we must increase our military strength and preparedness immediately." The President continued, "We have a tremendously rich and productive economy, and it is expanding every year. Our job now is to divert to defense purposes more of that tremendous productive capacity—more steel, more aluminum, more of a good many things...Our military needs are large, and to meet them will require hard work and steady effort. I know that we can produce what we need if each of us does his part—each man, each woman, each soldier, each civilian. This is a time for all of us to pitch in and work together."⁹⁰ By the end of 1950, the U.S. military budget would reach \$231 billion (in 2021 dollars).⁹¹

⁸⁹ Letter from Arthur H. Lee to Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, October 28, 1949, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 130, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁹⁰ Harry S. Truman, "Radio and Television Address to the American People on the Situation in Korea" (speech, Washington, DC, July 6, 1950), Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/soundrecording-records/sr62-79-1-radio-and-television-address-american-people-situation-korea>.

⁹¹ Martin Calhoun, "Center for Defense Information," U.S. Military Spending, 1945-1996 (Brooklyn College - City University of New York, July 9, 1996), <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/johnson/milspend.htm>.

For McClellan's boosters, Korea offered a lucrative opportunity. On August 7, 1950, Harry Ayers wrote a letter to U.S. Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson. Ayers detested the fact that in light of the "Korean Situation," six other infantry replacement centers across the country were to be reactivated. McClellan was not one of them. Like in many of his previous pleas to elected officials surrounding the fate of the Fort, Ayers painted a picture of McClellan as a patriotic, well-oiled machine. The Fort also boasted, he added, the highest reenlistment record of any similar post in the Army after WWII.⁹²

In addition to more customary troop mobilization in the wake of the Korean War, the defense economy was turning increasingly to the private sector to fund war efforts. This public-private military-industrial economy would soon be reflected in Annistonians' disparate visions for the future of the Fort. In seeking to secure a lucrative future for Northeast Alabama, Ayers offered defense-adjacent privatization as a possibility for the base's redevelopment. "If the Fort is not to be used," Ayers wrote, "I think it should be permanently abandoned and converted into industrial property that would be in the interest of the war effort."⁹³

Ayers' suggestion of converting McClellan into a private factory dedicated to military preparedness reflected a change in the structure of the military economy happening under Anniston's feet. The growing confluence between the public and the private sectors was becoming further cemented into the military economy as the Cold War became central to geopolitics and Americans desired more and more to retain the military spending that had bolstered their wallets during the WWII years. In 1950, President Truman signed into law the Defense Production Act. The act gave the executive branch the ability to mobilize American

⁹² Letter to Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson from Harry Ayers, August 7, 1950, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 131, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

⁹³ Ibid.

industry for the Korean War, and more largely, for the looming conflict with the Soviet Union.⁹⁴ Powers granted to Truman included the invocation of wage, price, and credit controls, the ability to require private businesses to accept and prioritize contracts for goods deemed critical to the national defense, and the ability to encourage U.S. industrial giants to engage in defense production through a variety of financial incentives. The Second World War had proven industry to be invaluable to American defense, as the federal government poured billions in taxpayer dollars into the private sector. In 1939 alone, Congress voted to spend over \$100 million in the aerospace industry, purchasing planes and engines from familiar commercial giants like Boeing, Lockheed, and General Motors.⁹⁵ Expanding fears about Soviet communism and a slew of overseas conflicts would only serve to strengthen this bond. In suggesting that Fort McClellan be converted into an “industrial property that would be in the interest of the war effort,” Harry Ayers understood the immense profitability of factories of the type and their value in the eyes of a warring American state.⁹⁶

Thankfully for Ayers and the like, ideas for a reinvented McClellan would soon be obscured by more promising news. In early January 1951, Mayor E. C. Lloyd received a telegram from Alabama’s congressional delegation reporting that Fort McClellan was to be reopened that year. By the early 1950s, military projects such as the reopening of McClellan dominated the economy of the South. New Deal programs, which had once acted as the most influential federal stimulus in the region, had been overwhelmingly superseded by military base

⁹⁴ Michael H Cecire and Heidi M Peters, “The Defense Production Act of 1950: History, Authorities, and Considerations for Congress,” *The Defense Production Act of 1950: History, Authorities, and Considerations for Congress* § (2020), https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20200302_R43767_aa51f9a5eafe50b69aca2039dab3e100c5129dcc.pdf.

⁹⁵ Wilson, *Destructive Creation*, 51.

⁹⁶ Letter to Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson from Harry Ayers, August 7, 1950, MSS.0670, Box 186, Folder 131, Lister Hill Papers, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

reactivations and public-private defense contracts. In June 1951, the U.S. Secretary of Defense requested \$29 million be spent at McClellan on troop housing, training facilities, and what would soon become the Women's Army Corps (WAC) training center.⁹⁷ Operations started at the new WAC Center three years later, with the first basic trainers reporting on June 10, 1954. Seven million dollars went into the center, which would come to house more than 2,000 women completing "basic training, clerical training, non-commissioned officer training, [and] officer candidate and officer basic courses."⁹⁸ In the decade that followed McClellan's reactivation, defense income would account for between ten and twenty percent of income growth throughout Alabama.⁹⁹

In the post-Korea years, the millions being poured into Anniston's military economy signaled success for Anniston's boosters, who had shifted their efforts almost entirely to attracting defense-related capital to the region. For FY1956, the military appropriated \$2.6 million for the Fort, including funds for 150 housing units, a chapel, a lumber and pipe shed, and a storehouse.¹⁰⁰ In a letter received by Hill in February, one booster lamented the decrepit conditions of the Fort's hospital, asking that the War Department consider building new facilities. The letter also included vivid depictions of the Fort's cutting-edge, budding infrastructure. It read,

⁹⁷ Letter from the Alabama Congressional delegation, June 20, 1952, Box 186, Folder 132, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

⁹⁸ Department of Defense Press Release, 1954, Box 186, Folder 132, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

⁹⁹ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 140.

¹⁰⁰ Army Projects in Military Construction Appropriations, 1956, Box 186, Folder 133, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Within the last two years, the Chemical Corps Training Command and the WAC Center have been provided with attractive, efficient and modern type facilities. The buildings are pleasant, fire proof and highly sanitary, and are arranged in such a manner as to facilitate the efficient performance of the organizational mission. The present hospital, on the other hand, is poorly arranged, difficult to maintain from the standpoint of personnel management, sanitation and maintenance, and is not fire resistant...Considering the cost of maintenance of this facility over a period of years and the economies of operation that result from a new structure, it would seem that the construction of a new, modern type hospital would be consistent with long range economy.¹⁰¹

Eventually, in 1959, President Eisenhower would pass a bill allocating \$2.6 million for the Fort McClellan Hospital.¹⁰² The letter's claims regarding efficiency and considerations of the "long range economy" were reiterations of the same themes that anchored arguments for keeping McClellan open in the World War II years: Fort McClellan was a prime site for training at which so much had already been invested, the region benefited greatly from this investment, and the geopolitical circumstances facing the United States required a strong Army, which McClellan could help provide.

By the Cold War years, efforts to secure additions like the Fort McClellan Hospital were deeply intertwined with a solidifying dependency between Anniston and the military-industrial complex. The business of war had brought critical investment to town, attracting federally stimulated development as well as an influx of taxpaying residents—both military personnel and civilians looking to work on and off the base. Between 1940 and 1950, Calhoun County's population grew by 25.6 percent, the third highest growth rate of any county in the state (behind

¹⁰¹ Letter from Kenneth Roberts to Lister Hill, 1956, Box 186, Folder 133, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

¹⁰² Letter from Lister Hill to Harry Ayers, 1959, Box 186, Folder 134, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Baldwin and Mobile Counties).¹⁰³ In the decade that followed, it would grow by 20.5 percent.¹⁰⁴ Seeing the multifaceted profitability of military investment for the region, Anniston's boosters lobbied for more funding, calling on the language of national security, military efficiency, and pragmatism. As Anniston became increasingly dependent on these funds to keep the city alive, fears of the military withdrawing escalated.

The economic benefits of the Fort continued to have an undeniable impact on the surrounding area during the Cold War era, specifically in the realm of civilian employment. In 1960, the Fort boasted 4,700 civilian employees with a net payroll of \$23.7 million. This was in addition to the \$14.2 million payroll directed towards military personnel.¹⁰⁵ Civilian paychecks paid by the Fort grew throughout the 1960s and 70s, as the Army began to contract out more and more jobs to civilians. Historically, on-base positions like barbers, janitors, maintenance workers, and drivers had been held by military personnel, in order to maintain the cultural insularity and security that had long trademarked the institution. However, during the Cold War years, military officials realized it was cheaper to contract out these jobs to civilian workers, as they did not need to provide them with military healthcare, commissaries, housing, and other benefits. Military personnel also increasingly did not want to work in blue-collar positions, which were often few of the sources of stable income in the area for working-class residents of Calhoun County.¹⁰⁶ By 1960, upwards of 1,200 homeowners in the Anniston area had salaries

¹⁰³ 1950 Census of Population: Advanced Reports, United States Department of Commerce. PC8-1, Washington, D.C., October 4, 1951. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1950/pc-08/pc-8-01.pdf> (December 14, 2021)

¹⁰⁴ 1960 Census of Population: Advance Reports, United States Department of Commerce, Luther H. Hodges. PC(A2)-1, Washington, D.C.: March 31, 1961. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1960/population-pc-a2/15611114.pdf> (December 14, 2021)

¹⁰⁵ Letter Marshall K. Hunter to Hill, January 5, 1962, Box 186, Folder 136, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

¹⁰⁶ Sorenson, *Shutting Down the Cold War*, 12.

that were paid by Fort McClellan.¹⁰⁷ It is important to note, however, that these benefits remained largely concentrated in the hands of white Annistonians. Throughout the Cold War years, the city's Black residents remained subjugated to low-wage work in local plants and foundries and resided in shoddy, contaminated neighborhoods near industrial sites. This era, too, was marked by remarkable racial violence against Black city residents, especially in the wake of the budding Civil Rights Movement.¹⁰⁸

This proliferation of defense and defense-adjacent jobs on and off the Fort continued to pull McClellan's surrounding community further into the cycle of military dependency. McClellan's insurmountable presence in town made it such that all industries, from food service to lodging to retail, oriented—at least in part—towards the Army. Soldiers and military officials spent their dollars in downtown Anniston, paying the salaries of Annistonians and further facilitating economic growth. Service became a desirable industry to be in, as troop after troop of soldier landed on base, in need of a cold beer to drink, a movie to watch, or a meal to eat. As Michael Brenes writes, Annistonians were “the working-class Americans who provided lunches to the workers, pumped gas into their cars after they left the factory, mowed their lawns in the summer, and fixed their pipes when they froze in the winter.”¹⁰⁹ Phillip Tutor said of the Cold War years, “It was not uncommon to see the restaurant full of people in uniform. Because, again, it's a military town.”¹¹⁰

Capital poured into Anniston, too, as the federal government signed agreements with local contractors when work was required on the base. In 1960 alone, the Army spent \$1.6 million

¹⁰⁷ Letter Marshall K. Hunter to Hill, January 5, 1962, Box 186, Folder 136, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

¹⁰⁸ See “Chapter 5: War in a Time of Peace” in Spears' *Baptized in PCBs*

¹⁰⁹ Brenes, *For Might and Right*.

¹¹⁰ Phillip Tutor, interview by Denali Sagner, June 16, 2021, Anniston, Alabama.

dollars on purchases for Fort McClellan. Many of such transactions occurred within the local community, if not within the state of Alabama. Payments to utilities amounted to \$760,000 and \$2.2 million was spent on construction.¹¹¹ On top of the paychecks sent to Annistonians who worked on and near the base, these contracts allowed for the construction of new facilities and the employment of new workers. This influx of capital bestowed additional funding onto the local government, which in turn used it to improve public goods. In a 1962 letter to Lister Hill, President of the First National Bank of Anniston, Marshall K. Hunter, discussed the “some 300-odd thousand dollars paid into our school system because of the federally impacted area.”¹¹²

This development helped make Anniston an attractive place to live and work. By 1960, Calhoun County residents boasted a median family income of \$4,413, compared to the state median of \$3,937.¹¹³ As Annistonians became accustomed to the growing number of soldiers in the area and the financial backing brought on by the Fort, the city took on an identity—politically and culturally—as a “military town.” In his letter, Hunter also wrote,

In addition to the material benefits that the community derives from our military installations, we find that the Chemical Corps, particularly, brings to us a very large number of individuals with one or more educational degrees. The entire group, both Chemical, Post and WAC personnel, participate in a large way in the civic affairs of Anniston, and we find add a great deal to the cultural life of the community.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Letter Marshall K. Hunter to Hill, January 5, 1962, Box 186, Folder 136, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

¹¹² Letter Marshall K. Hunter to Hill, January 5, 1962, Box 186, Folder 136, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

¹¹³ 1960 Census of Population: Supplementary Reports, United States Department of Commerce, John T. Connor. PC(S1)-48, Washington, D.C., July 30, 1965. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1960/pc-s1-supplementary-reports/pc-s1-48.pdf> (December 14, 2021)

¹¹⁴ Letter Marshall K. Hunter to Hill, January 5, 1962, Box 186, Folder 136, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

By the time the United States entered Vietnam in 1964, Anniston's political economy and civic life could not be separated from the Army's presence. Chip Howell remembers the presence of troops in town from his earliest days. "It was an anchor. It was a wonderful economic shot in the arm...[and] it was just always here...I saw a lot of soldiers downtown, saw a lot of activity," he says.¹¹⁵ However, the geopolitical and economic circumstances which made war a profitable business, and which made Anniston a booming town, faced a tenuous future as the United States moved into the second half of the twentieth century. By the 1970s, Anniston would find itself faced with a changing global economy—one powered by technology, automation, and the shifting nature of the Cold War.

¹¹⁵ Chip Howell, interview by Denali Sagner, July 2, 2021, Anniston, Alabama.

CHAPTER 2:

De-escalation and Deindustrialization: An unraveling city in the Cold War era

The financial stability derived from Anniston's military-industrial identity would begin to wane by the early 1970s. In 1973, the federal government announced a study considering the possible closure of Fort McClellan. Northeast Alabamians, who had grown accustomed to the financial security the Fort brought, were appalled by the news. The President and Executive Vice President of the Gadsden Metro Chamber of Commerce (a city situated about 30 miles northeast of Anniston) wrote to Representative Tom Bevill, citing the "substantial percentage" of McClellan's employees hailing from Gadsden and the "many citizens who are retired military personnel...[and] depend on the services and facilities available to them at Fort McClellan, especially the excellent medical facilities."¹¹⁶ Four Representatives in the Alabama statehouse proposed a resolution in opposition to the closure. Citing the strong support given by Calhoun County to the Armed Forces since 1917, both monetarily and civically, the legislators wrote, "[During the Great War] the citizens of Anniston patriotically underwrote additional funds in the amount of \$136,000...an obligation which cost the citizens of Anniston much anxiety and hard work and was not paid off until 1934."¹¹⁷ In efforts to push against the federal inquiry into closure, the Representatives highlighted the region's "favorable climate," high caliber of civilian and military personnel, well-developed preexisting structures for training and "a closely

¹¹⁶ Letter from the Gadsden Metro Chamber of Commerce to Bevill, August 23, 1973, Box 6374, Folder 7, Tom Bevill papers (MSS.0152), The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

¹¹⁷ Resolution from Alabama House of Representatives on possible closure, September 18, 1973, Box 6374, Folder 7, Tom Bevill papers (MSS.0152), The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

interwoven relationship of mutual respect between Fort McClellan personnel and the citizens of Anniston.”

Pushes to retain the base by legislators were fueled by community concerns regarding unemployment, disinvestment, and a loss of social services. W. E. Hough, a Gadsden resident, visited Representative Bevill’s office to express concerns about the many military retirees like himself who used McClellan’s facilities and were “entitled to these privileges.” Hough believed that “before Stateside bases and facilities are closed down...that oversea installations should go first...that everyone knows there are some oversea bases that are of little use.” Another resident, Jerry Smith, cited the thousands of retired military personnel in the area—himself included—who relied on the services McClellan provided. In responses to constituents, Bevill ensured his “full efforts to keep Fort McClellan open.”¹¹⁸

The federal study would not come to fruition in 1973 and McClellan would remain in operation for the next two-and-a-half decades. While a shock to local residents, the prospect of base closure in the 1970s followed larger political and economic patterns pushing the U.S. towards a new kind of defense economy—one that would ultimately not bode well for historic installations like Fort McClellan. While the immediate post-war years represented the fruitful successes brought about by the partnership between defense capitalism and the industrial economy in the Anniston area, shifts in the American political economy and the military at large would begin to chip away at this era of prosperity. The threat of base closure in 1973 and the sheer panic it elicited would mark the beginning of a long and tenuous fight to retain the base, which would ultimately end in a devastating result. This chapter will seek to follow Anniston and Fort McClellan through three major shifts in how the United States engaged in the business of

¹¹⁸ Letter from Jerry Smith to Bevill, September 5, 1973, Box 6374, Folder 7, Tom Bevill papers (MSS.0152), The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

war: the end of the conflict in Vietnam, deindustrialization in the American manufacturing sector, and the increasingly technology-heavy and personnel-light orientation of the Armed Forces. With the onset of these changes, it becomes clear that while early industrial development aided Anniston in attracting military development in the first half of the twentieth century, the same industries—now deteriorating in a modernizing economy—would harm Anniston, pushing away much of the military investment it had once attracted.

Anniston's relationship with the military remained lucrative through much of the Vietnam and immediate post-Vietnam era. In April of 1966—a year when the U.S. had more than 385,000 troops in Vietnam—the Army announced an expansion of training operations at Fort McClellan involving 2,850 new personnel.¹¹⁹ McClellan boasted important branches of the Army, namely the Military Police Corps, the Chemical Corps, and the Women's Army Corps, where every woman entering the Army completed her basic training. McClellan's U.S. Army Chemical School, a relic of the long history of the American chemical industry in town, trained soldiers in advanced chemical warfare techniques, the only institution of its kind in the U.S. military system.¹²⁰ In 1969 alone, 12,007 Alabama National Guardsmen trained at the Fort during weekend and summer intensive camps.¹²¹ According to *The Star*, the hills of Pelham Range resounded with the sound of reservists shooting 155 millimeters guns each week. Chip Howell remembers Anniston as particularly alive with U.S. soldiers during the Vietnam Era, from the

¹¹⁹ Telegram from Hill and John Sparkman to the Associated Press about new training brigade, April 26, 1966, Box 186, Folder 137, Lister Hill Papers MSS.0670, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, "Vietnam War Allied Troop Levels 1960-73," Vietnam War Allied Troop Levels 1960-73 (The American War Library, December 8, 2006), <https://www.americanwarlibrary.com/vietnam/vwat1.htm>.

¹²⁰ "678 Jobs Lost At McClellan; No Details Given," *The Anniston Star*, March 5, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115177497/>

¹²¹ "McClellan Plays Role in Reserve, Guard Training," *The Anniston Star*, January 7, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/116089740>

presence of military men in town to the training blasts that rattled his childhood home. He remembers,

Helicopters were always in the air. We had a Vietnam mock village that was fairly close to where I grew up. A lot of my friends would...reach the fence and find ordinance and save it for souvenirs, not realizing how dangerous that probably was. Pelham Range, which was an extension of McClellan, was always under some kind of maneuver. So, booms and shakes were expected.¹²²

As it had in previous decades, the Fort provided lucrative salaries to residents of Calhoun County and spurred development in the local economy. During 1962 alone, approximately 920 civilians were employed at Fort McClellan at a payroll of \$5.01 million.¹²³ In February 1970, Fort McClellan received approval to build a new library, complete with air-conditioning, a children's room, and increased work and stack space. Base-adjacent businesses continued to provide support to the many troops cycling in and out of town, and federal contracts yielded both infrastructural development and salaried blue-collar positions.

Shifting American consciousness surrounding the necessity of costly wars, however, would soon imperil the missions bringing much-needed capital to the Anniston area. The immediate post-war years in the United States had marked a "golden age" for American military hegemony and, consequentially, support for military spending. In 1950, 44 percent of polled respondents, when asked if Americans had been asked to make too many sacrifices for the cause of the American defense program, said that they had not been asked to make enough.¹²⁴ In 1951, 59

¹²² Chip Howell, interview by Denali Sagner, July 2, 2021, Anniston, Alabama.

¹²³ "County Notes Anniversary of the Civil Service Act," *The Anniston Star*, January 20, 1963, p. 8. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115150726>

¹²⁴ National Opinion Research Center (NORC), NORC Survey # 1950-0287: Foreign Affairs, Question 8, USNORC.500287.R08, National Opinion Research Center (NORC), (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 1950), Dataset, DOI: {doi}.

percent believed the U.S. was correct in sending troops to intervene in the Korean peninsula.¹²⁵ While Americans had offered almost unwavering support—both politically and fiscally—for exercises of military might to fight communist aggression immediately following World War II, the Vietnam War would mark a turning point. Between 1965 and 1970 alone, the United States spent \$86.4 billion on the Vietnam War, in addition to standard defense costs.¹²⁶ By 1975, that number would jump to \$110.7 billion.¹²⁷ On top of the high price tag of Vietnam, Americans had grown tired of fighting a foreign war that was becoming increasingly impossible to win. Throughout the late 1960s and early 70s, protests erupted across the country in defiance of the conflict. On October 20th, 1967, the *New York Times* reported that “thousands of demonstrators against the war in Vietnam began moving into the nation’s capital,” including communists, draft-dodgers, civil rights activists, and “flower children.”¹²⁸

Anti-Vietnam sentiment was representative of a larger issue beginning to show itself in American politics: the “unwarranted influence” of the “military-industrial complex” President Dwight Eisenhower had once warned about.¹²⁹ With the onset of the Second World War, various private businesses worked closely with the federal government to transition civilian factories to military uses. During the war years, the federal government purchased and operated acres of new industrial plants, managed military supply chains, controlled prices and profits, and regulated contractors as corporations made millions of dollars manufacturing guns, ships, and ammunition.

¹²⁵ National Opinion Research Center (NORC), NORC Survey: Foreign Affairs, Question 7, USNORC.510300.R05, National Opinion Research Center (NORC), (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 1951), Dataset, DOI: {doi}.

¹²⁶ “Vietnam Statistics - War Costs: Complete Picture Impossible.” CQ Almanac Online Edition, 1976. <https://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/document.php?id=cqal75-1213988>.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ E. W. Kenworthy, “Thousands Reach Capital To Protest Vietnam War,” *The New York Times*, October 27, 1967, pp. 1-8, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1967/10/27/88495579.html?pageNumber=1>.

¹²⁹ “President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address,” Our Documents - President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address (1961) (OurDocuments.gov, January 17, 1961), <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=90>.

At the end of WWII, both the federal government and defense contractors feared losing the overwhelming economic stimulus created by the war. This desire to retain a prosperous economic system constructed during wartime, combined with increasing threats of Soviet communism, allowed for the war economy to attain an unbreakable power, even while the country was at peace. In the decades that followed WWII, wide-reaching state-sponsored policies designed to facilitate the growth of the defense economy continued to award companies involved in weapons production and enabled the massive expansion of the defense budget throughout the latter part of the twentieth century.

Popular exposures of the influence of the military-industrial complex in popular culture gave Americans a more concrete understanding of its machinations, further pushing them to question the defense expenditures which had long upheld economies like Anniston's. By the late 1960s, magazines, newspapers, films, and books had begun to unearth the deep-seated relationship between private defense contractors, the Pentagon, Congress, and taxpayers. *The Selling of the Pentagon*, a popular documentary film that aired on CBS in 1971, discussed the lengths the Department of Defense had gone to to sell the Vietnam War to Americans.¹³⁰ In late summer 1969, the majority of surveyed Americans believed the U.S. government was spending too much on national defense and military purposes.¹³¹ While in 1965, 24 percent of Americans believed the United States had made a mistake in sending troops to Vietnam, that number would reach 60 percent by 1972.¹³² Americans wanted an end to the war, and with it, an end to the unprecedented expenditures which had defined it.

¹³⁰ Brenes, *For Might and Right*, 123-124.

¹³¹ "Gallup Poll Finds 52% Consider U.S. Defense Outlay Too Large," *The New York Times*, August 14, 1969, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1969/08/14/78391281.html?pageNumber=14>.

¹³² Tom Rosentel and Jodie T Allen, "Polling Wars: Hawks vs. Doves," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/2009/11/23/polling-wars-hawks-vs-doves/>.

Annistonians did not share in this desire for massive rollback of the defense economy, however, as it marked a threat to the lifeline that had long sustained the region. Despite this, larger national calls to de-escalate the bloated military would ultimately prevail as the federal government began to search for ways to cut costs. In October of 1969, the Army cut 48 civilian jobs from Fort McClellan.¹³³ Three months later, in “keeping with the latest announced cuts in personnel by the Defense Department,” 50 more civilians received layoff notices. In this round of cuts, the Army dismissed civilian workers across departments in hopes to “minimize the effect of a reduction” and maintain the stability and efficiency of all of McClellan’s services. Cuts happened across function and rank—of the 50 let go, 24 employees were salaried and 26 were hourly workers. Those let go were allowed to temporarily retain Department of Defense benefits such as “stability of employment programs for career employees” and “priority rights to vacancies in other defense activities and priority for employment.”¹³⁴ On the same day *The Star* announced this civilian reduction, the newspaper ran a story from the Associated Press reporting that the Pentagon estimated to save \$57 million per year by eliminating 7,310 civilian jobs at domestic military bases in two dozen states. The article read, “Completion of these cutbacks will mean a total reduction since last fall of 33,700 civilian jobs within the Army...Pentagon officials recently said they expect the trend to continue in the coming fiscal year with close to another 75,000 civilian jobs eliminated during the 12-month period starting next July.”¹³⁵ In addition to cuts to civilian on-base jobs, the Department of Defense began to significantly roll back the presence of Army soldiers at the Fort. In March of 1970, the Army announced the removal of

¹³³ “678 Jobs Lost At McClellan; No Details Given,” *The Anniston Star*, March 5, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115177497/>

¹³⁴ “50 Civilians Get Dismissal Slips At Fort,” *The Anniston Star*, January 10, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/116089883/>

¹³⁵ “Pentagon Estimates Savings,” *The Anniston Star*, January 10, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/116089883/>

678 military personnel from Fort McClellan and the phasing out of the Advanced Infantry Training Brigade, a Vietnam-mobilization unit. According to *The Star*'s reporting, these cuts were “part of a Pentagon plan to reduce strength at 371 military installations at home and abroad at an announced saving of more than \$914 million.”¹³⁶

Post-Vietnam de-escalation at Fort McClellan was not the only change threatening Calhoun County's economy. By the 1970s, deindustrialization, automation, and offshoring in the American manufacturing sector had begun to ravage industrial towns like Anniston. Anniston's early industrialization had historically given it a competitive edge over much of the agricultural, underdeveloped South. The town, in fact, proclaimed itself the “cast-iron soil pipe capital of the world” in its heyday.¹³⁷ Alabama—and Anniston specifically—produced much of the country's textiles, chemicals, and cast-iron pipes through the early Cold War years. Between 1962 and 1964, industrial expenditures in the Anniston area increased from \$1.9 million to \$2.5 million.¹³⁸ Industrial players in the local economy created myriad low-skill employment opportunities, as well as an influx of capital that was poured into public programs via corporate taxes. By 1960, upwards of 3,500 men worked in the factories of five Anniston area cast-iron soil pipe companies.¹³⁹

In an increasingly connected global economy, however, Anniston's industrial stature would begin to wane. At the end of the Second World War, the United States remained the only major nation not brutalized by the destruction of war, and its consumers returned to the peacetime

¹³⁶ “678 Jobs Lost At McClellan; No Details Given,” *The Anniston Star*, March 5, 1970,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/115177497/>

¹³⁷ Mike Sherman, “Plastics potential threat to iron soil pipe industry,” *The Anniston Star*, June 10, 1971, p 3D,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/115166038/>

¹³⁸ “Economy Brighter for City, County,” *The Anniston Star*, May 17, 1964, p. 10A,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/116470509/>

¹³⁹ “Today Was Payday in Anniston,” *The Anniston Star*, March 25, 1960,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/109627096/>

economy eager to spend. Concurrently, the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement had designated the U.S. dollar the world's reserve currency, making it the ubiquitous powerbroker in the global economy. Bretton Woods allowed the United States to quickly become the largest global exporter of goods and investor of multinational capital. What would follow would be an unprecedented economic boom marked by spending, investing, and exporting various American products to all corners of the globe. In the midst of this boom, American workers began to claim ownership of their piece of this growing economic pie. Industrial laborers, who were producing the goods fueling American prosperity, soon began to demand more from corporate giants, such as healthcare benefits, paid time off, safe working conditions, and reasonable hours. Initially, many of these demands, often brought to the table by formidable industrial unions, were met.¹⁴⁰

By the 1970s, however, the economies of Western Europe and Japan had largely recovered—due in large part to aid from a United States increasingly concerned about communist aggression—and began to present serious competition for American manufacturers. In 1979, Japan exported \$26 billion worth of goods to the United States. In return, the U.S. exported only \$17.5 billion to Japan.¹⁴¹ In addition to Japan and Western Europe, “Newly Industrialized Counties” like Taiwan, South Korea, Mexico, and Brazil began to compete in the global market with their manufactured goods.

As industrial power, once concentrated solely in the U.S., dispersed increasingly across the globe, American corporate profits began to suffer, prompting companies to shift their focus to cost-cutting maneuvers. Between 1963 and 1966, the average rate of return on all assets for American companies was 15.5 percent, a number which would drop to 9.7 percent by the end of

¹⁴⁰ Bluestone, “Deindustrialization and Unemployment in America,” 8-12.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

the 1970s.¹⁴² Cost-cutting efforts focused on reducing labor expenditures and taxes paid to local, state, and federal governments. Many companies relocated from urban to rural areas and from the North to the South, as tax burdens were lower and union power was weaker in Southern states. Many others moved operations from domestic to international sites, where looser labor laws allowed companies to pay factory workers dismally low salaries and evade many of the demands for benefits and fair working conditions made by American workers in the post-war years. Moving operations abroad—a phenomenon that would come to usurp much of Anniston’s industry—was made increasingly easy by advancements in air transportation, which made it so that goods could be seamlessly carted across the globe from cheaper labor markets to countries that would purchase them.

These patterns of globalization and technological advancement would not be kind to Alabama’s, and especially not to Anniston’s manufacturing sector. In the late twentieth century, the Anniston metropolitan area found itself facing plant closure after plant closure, throwing many residents into the depths of poverty and unemployment. Traditional manufacturing industries like textiles, pipes, and home construction found themselves particularly hard hit.¹⁴³ In June 1970, *The Star* reported on the suffering of the cast-iron pipe industry—Anniston’s largest business—which was declining at the hands of foreign manufacturers.¹⁴⁴ In 1971, Anniston Foundry laid off almost one-third of its 1,050 employee workforce due to “lack of work” and an “off” market.¹⁴⁵ In October 1974, *The Star* reported that Mead Pipe would shortly lay off 375 employees at its three Anniston foundries in the weeks to come. These brutal cuts came on the

¹⁴² Ibid., 10

¹⁴³ William L. Chaze, “Dark Clouds over Dixie,” *The Anniston Star*, March 21, 1971, p 5, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115151523/>

¹⁴⁴ “Perry testifies on pipe,” *The Anniston Star*, July 17, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/109603884/>

¹⁴⁵ “Foundry lays of employees,” *The Anniston Star*, December 4, 1971, p. 9, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115211181>

heels of a 100-employee reduction by Lee Brothers Foundry and the closure of prefabricated home builder Evanway Homes in September, which put 60 to 70 more Annistonians out of work. Evanway's layoffs, *The Star* reported, "were related to the slump in the homebuilding industry."¹⁴⁶ Additionally, the rising prominence of plastics marked a consequential threat to the soil pipe industry as traditional cast-iron pipes became increasingly supplanted by new, plastic infrastructure.¹⁴⁷

Closures and layoffs disrupted community life in Northeast Alabama, as local residents were forced to contend with unemployment and the losses of major economic anchors in town. In 1987, *The Star* recounted the downsizing of Anniston's historic Blue Mountain Mill. As the mill faced dubious layoffs due to shrinking business prospects, residents of the Blue Mountain neighborhood of Anniston reminisced about a more prosperous time, in which a vibrant community full of families, local businesses, and industrial workers developed around the mill. At its height, the mill employed 1,000 Annistonians, in addition to those employed by adjacent businesses geared towards its workers. By 1987, it employed less than 600. T. Allen Rothwell, a Northern transplant to Anniston, attributed this change almost entirely to an increase in imported goods. "Twenty years ago, 20 percent of shoes purchased in the U.S. were made here, now 80 percent are imported," *The Star* quoted Rothwell saying. "Our market has dried up considerably."¹⁴⁸

Deindustrialization and military de-escalation coincided in yet another shift that would come to exacerbate decline for the Anniston area: an increasingly technology-heavy and personnel-

¹⁴⁶ "375 jobs in layoffs," *The Anniston Star*, October 8, 1974, p. 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115174407>

¹⁴⁷ Mike Sherman, "Plastics potential threat to iron soil pipe industry," *The Anniston Star*, June 10, 1971, p. 3D, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115166038/>.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Kavanagh, "Mill Workers Reflect on Changes," *The Anniston Star*, November 29, 1987, pp. 1C-4C, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106464693>.

light orientation of the United States military. In *The Rise of the Gunbelt*, Markusen and others call the Korean War “a conventional war fought with conventional equipment, [and] perhaps the last of its kind.”¹⁴⁹ 1.8 million American soldiers served in Korea and 2.7 million in Vietnam, many of whom would pass through Fort McClellan for training.¹⁵⁰ While the early Cold War years were marked by a need to exert hard power on the world’s stage through the proliferation of American troops abroad, the later part of the era marked a turn towards a novel form of military influence. By the end of Vietnam, the Department of Defense began to adopt an entirely new orientation, one marked by heavily automated, high-technology weaponry. Competition with the Soviet Union made it such that the U.S. was increasingly invested in the massive buildup of space systems and missiles, a program which favored the aerospace abilities of the Armed Forces. This shift would only be solidified during Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative years.¹⁵¹ As prime contract allocation for aircrafts, electronics, and communication systems increased greatly from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, allocations for ammunition and other more traditional forms of weaponry steeply declined.¹⁵² For Anniston, a military town which had only ever housed traditional Army operations, this change signaled impending trouble.

The 1960s and 70s were also marked by the ascendance of “research and development” (R&D) in the American military, which brought immense growth to the Southern economy. In the later Cold War years, R&D grew to a massive segment of defense allocations, as the Department of Defense aspired to produce novel and increasingly dangerous weapons and

¹⁴⁹ Markusen, et al., *The Rise of the Gunbelt*, 16.

¹⁵⁰ “Military Health History Pocket Card,” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://www.va.gov/oaa/pocketcard/m-index.asp#toc> and Jason Gauthier, “U.S. Census Bureau History: The Korean War,” United States Census Bureau, June 2017, https://www.census.gov/history/www/homepage_archive/2017/june_2017.html.

¹⁵¹ Markusen, et al., *The Rise of the Gunbelt*, 16.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 17.

computers and to compete with Soviet science and aeronautic capabilities. R&D projects facilitated a near-constant stream of federal funding funneled towards military-oriented development in private plants, non-profit organizations, and research universities. Military-industrial contracting giants who were able to meet growing demands for sleeker, stronger, computerized weapons profited from the federal government's desire to increase its technological capabilities in the defense sphere. The American South's low taxes, hostile environment for workers' unions, mild weather, and deep history of military support made it a prime region to house these new projects. By 1973, more Southerners worked in defense-related industries than apparel, synthetics, and textiles combined.¹⁵³ Between 1981 and 1985, defense spending accounted for nearly 1 million new jobs in the United States and 17 percent of all growth in private sector employment, much of which occurred south of the Mason-Dixon line.¹⁵⁴ Of America's ten largest defense contractors, seven ran large operations in the Southern United States—namely Lockheed, McDonnell-Douglas, Rockwell, and General Dynamics.¹⁵⁵

Previously rural areas like central North Carolina serve as examples of how Southern boosters capitalized on the high-tech military-industrial climate of the Cold War years. In the late 1950s, staring down a dismal economic future for their largely rural and structurally impoverished state, boosters in North Carolina began imagining a new business venture. The state's more traditional industries—furniture, textiles, and agriculture—offered little room for economic growth in a rapidly modernizing global economy. Additionally, mechanization and automation had pushed workers out of some of the only remaining jobs.¹⁵⁶ The North Carolina

¹⁵³ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 141.

¹⁵⁴ Markusen, et al., *The Rise of the Sunbelt*, 9.

¹⁵⁵ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 142

¹⁵⁶ Alex Sayf Cummings, *Brain Magnet: Research Triangle Park and the Idea of the Idea Economy* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2020), 11.

Research Triangle Park (RTP) would become the fruits of these efforts to reform North Carolina's struggling economy. Constructed in between North Carolina State University, Duke University, and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, RTP would become the largest research park in the United States. The *Greensboro Daily News* described what would become the RTP not only as a financial opportunity, but as "a concentration of human and scientific resources aimed at the betterment of mankind."¹⁵⁷ In the mid-1960s, RTP secured the presence of government research branches like the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and corporate giants like International Business Machines Corporation (IBM).¹⁵⁸ "The Triangle," the nickname for the metropolitan area cropping up around RTP, attracted workers from chemical engineers to janitors, who brought with them families and capital to spend in the region. RTP focused on research, high-tech innovation, and technological development. By the 1960s, Central North Carolina, a region that once offered a mirror image to Anniston, was irrevocably changed due to persistent lobbying by boosters who saw the profitability of defense-oriented research. In 1964 alone, RTP received 41 percent of its income from defense contracts.¹⁵⁹ Other, similar, ventures allowed for the flourishing of other previously barren Southern landscapes. In the mid-1950s, the federal government and the Dupont chemical corporation redeveloped rural South Carolina with the establishment of the Savannah River Plant, a nuclear weapons research site.¹⁶⁰

RTP serves as a salient comparative example of Southern economic life when attempting to understand Anniston's decline in the second half of the twentieth century. Anniston's boosters spent much of the Cold War era lobbying for the retention of older industries and employment at

¹⁵⁷ Cummings, *Brain Magnet*, 11.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Kari Frederickson, *Cold War Dixie: Militarization and Modernization in the American South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013).

Fort McClellan, in place of securing high-tech grants for development like RTP. With continued layoffs in traditional manufacturing sectors and a deficiency of new development, the region's middle- and working-class residents suffered. The creation of technology-oriented jobs in the "New South" in places like RTP did not make up for the jobs lost by cities like Anniston. When Northeast Alabama's plants and foundries shuttered in the second half of the twentieth century, job losses for low-wage workers did not translate into comparable gains in high-tech sectors—sectors which simply did not exist in Calhoun County. Workers' positions on the occupational spectrum deteriorated.¹⁶¹ Few moved up to higher paying jobs and achieved a greater standard of living. Victims of plant closures were often unemployed for long stretches of time, and remained largely stagnant in the labor market, only returning to similarly low-wage and unstable factory jobs upon finding new employment. In communities like Anniston which not only housed dying industries, but were largely dependent on them, closures catalyzed a shrinking in the local tax base which hindered public services like emergency response protection, education, and recreation.¹⁶² Despite this, factors like homeownership, family and community ties, and relocation costs kept Annistonians tied to the area in place of seeking out new employment in more prosperous corners of the United States.¹⁶³

Unlike the labor-intensive industrial and military foundations that built Anniston, new kinds of defense work anchoring places like RTP required far less labor than ever before. Manufacturing novel, high-tech weapons required small teams of workers with highly specialized skills and top-secret security clearances, a stark contrast from the massive assembly lines that built earlier generations of weapons. Military contractors needed engineers, scientists,

¹⁶¹ Bluestone, "Deindustrialization and Unemployment in America," 5.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 59.

technicians, as well as large corporate teams, to help construct—and sell—multi-million-dollar weapons to their biggest customer: the federal government of the United States.¹⁶⁴ Job creation focused on these highly-skilled sectors—rather than on the on-base jobs held by working class Annistonians and assembly line positions in factories. Consequentially, much of the capital generated through contracts would remain in the hands of defense powerbrokers and white-collar workers in wealthier regions of the country—never reaching workers in Anniston who increasingly found themselves jobless at the hands of plant closure and military base downsizing.

Failed federal legislation requiring an equitable distribution of defense contracts can also be attributed, in part, to Anniston's inability to attract such development. In 1959, New York Senators Jacob Javits and Kenneth Keating and New Jersey Senator Clifford Case introduced the Armed Services Competitive Procurement Act, which would require the Pentagon to place defense contracts in underserved areas that had been largely untouched by its funding. The bill was proposed by Northerners who resented the disproportionate amount of defense money being funneled towards the South and West and was designed largely to fund deindustrializing Northern cities like Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Detroit, Michigan, and Gary, Indiana. Because of this positioning, the bill experienced a quick death in Congress at the hands of Southern politicians. However, the proposed legislation (and other similar bills shot down by Southern legislators), would have benefitted Anniston as an old, industrial town struggling to contend with lack of development.¹⁶⁵ The collateral consequences of the region's representatives blocking the legislation for fear of losing funding in high-tech Sunbelt cities manifested in further poverty for Calhoun County.

¹⁶⁴ Markusen, et al., *The Rise of the Gunbelt*, 35.

¹⁶⁵ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 144-145

The late Cold War years would bring the United States further into the technological future, as the Reagan administration pursued ultramodern programs like the Strategic Defense Initiative and funneled millions of dollars into the construction of aerospace weapons like the B-1B Lancer bomber and the MX missile. Technology advanced and American industrial giants continued to pursue cheaper offshore labor and computerized manufacturing to cut costs in a globalizing economy. As these innovations touched the defense sector, the Pentagon sought expensive and complex weapons construction while vastly cutting its numbers of civilian and military employees. While the Army had 2.24 million active-duty military personnel in 1989, the number would drop to less than 1.64 million in 1995.¹⁶⁶ By the time the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, the United States military was unrecognizable in comparison to the massive Vietnam-era fleet it once boasted. It was in the context of these changes that the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process would come to fruition, solidifying the long and complex process of military downsizing which had been initiated years prior. For Anniston, which had proven unable to capitalize on these transformational shifts, and rather remained tethered to its older industries, BRAC would mark a closure that would rapidly escalate its decades-long decline.

¹⁶⁶ “U.S. Military Size 1985-2021,” MacroTrends, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/USA/united-states/military-army-size>.

CHAPTER 3:

Shutting Off a Lifeline: The Base Realignment and Closure Process and Fort McClellan in the 1990's

January 1, 1990, came in with in thunderstorms in Northeast Alabama—a celestial foreshadowing of the dismal outcomes the new decade would bring for the region.¹⁶⁷ By the early 1990s, the American military-industrial economy had been eternally transformed from its mid-century stature. The power of private defense contractors swelled as military companies won diverse contracts from the federal government to manufacture everything from buses to drones to solar energy systems.¹⁶⁸ In 1990, the U.S. Customs Service granted General Electric a \$52 million contract to build “radar balloons to detect planes smuggling illegal drugs across southern borders” and Lockheed a \$58 million contract for two P-3B radar planes. Martin Marietta received \$900 million to create a radar system for the Federal Aviation Administration. The market for these defense-related research and development projects amounted to an astounding \$120 billion annually. At the same time, the need for military bases continued to shrink, as well as what was left of the dwindling domestic manufacturing sector. While 1990s operations in the Middle East necessitated some on-the-ground troops, their scope paled in comparison to previous wars (while nearly three million soldiers were deployed to Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, only 695,000 were deployed to the Gulf region during operations Desert Shield and Storm).¹⁶⁹ In a post-Soviet climate, which returned America to its previous hegemonic place on the world’s stage, calls for massive military downsizing swept across the country. The most salient and wide-reaching output of these demands would be the years-long

¹⁶⁷ “Weather,” *The Anniston Star*, January 1, 1990, p. 12A, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106658154>

¹⁶⁸ Eric Weiner, “New Strategies for Military Suppliers,” *The New York Times*, April 12, 1990, pp. 64-71, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1990/04/12/027390.html?pageNumber=64>.

¹⁶⁹ “America’s Wars,” *America’s Wars* § (2021).

Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. This chapter seeks to follow Anniston and Fort McClellan through the end of the twentieth century, as the town and its base fought, and lost, a lengthy battle against the federal government's BRAC process. It will examine the politics of BRAC, the grim reality of continuing deindustrialization, and the question of why and how, as the country moved forward, Anniston, Alabama was left behind.

By the 1970s, military downsizing and manufacturing deindustrialization threatened the permanence of local military bases like Fort McClellan and the livelihoods of industrial centers like Anniston, respectively. For a time, boosters with a vested interest in military spending were able to grasp onto what was left of the domestic military base infrastructure. In 1977, the federal government passed legislation requiring Congressional approval for any base closure impacting 300 or more civilian workers employed by the Department of Defense, making it such that between the beginning of the Carter administration and the onset of the BRAC process, there was not a single major base closure.¹⁷⁰ The maintenance of such an expansive—and arguably bloated—defense budget in the late Cold War years could be attributed to activism by local boosters, legislators, corporations, and private citizens. Military communities like Anniston survived as these actors lobbied Congress for continued funding in their respective installations, hoping to retain the jobs and federal funds which had long marked their presence. In many cases, increased defense funding survived despite opposition by the military, as Congressional leaders passed spending bills with extensive military components, largely to further investment in their

¹⁷⁰ Andy Hultquist and Tricia L. Petras, "An Examination of the Local Economic Impacts of Military Base Closures," *Economic Development Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (November 2012): pp. 151-161, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891242412442374>.

own districts. In 1982 alone, the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Construction voted to spend \$300 million on bases the Pentagon had voted to close.¹⁷¹

By the late 1980s, however, the disintegration of the Soviet bloc would serve as an impetus for the federal government to roll out a sweeping and comprehensive base closure program. In June of 1989, communism fell in Poland with the popular election of the trade union, Solidarity. Hungary would follow three months later, succeeded by the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany and successful independence movements in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. As President George H. W. Bush reflected on Thanksgiving of 1989, days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, “This is not the end of the book of history, but it's a joyful end to one of history's saddest chapters.”¹⁷²

The end of this chapter would mark the beginning of a new one for the United States and Northeast Alabama, one marked by rapid and expansive military de-escalation. The federal government attempted its first serious round of base closures since the Carter years in 1988. While 1988 marked a first execution of what would become the standardized base closure process, it was a limited round of shutterings that remained largely tied up in district-level partisan politics. While the process was rooted in efforts to limit Congressional involvement in base closures, the 1988 legislation was riddled with loopholes allowing interference by legislators. In the end, most bases slated for closure were concentrated in a few states while others remained unscathed—due likely to the persistent impact of pork-barrel politics.¹⁷³ The 1988 commission considered moving McClellan’s Military Police School to Fort Dix, New

¹⁷¹ Sorenson, *Shutting Down the Cold War*, 27.

¹⁷² “Transcript of President's Speech on Relations between the East and West,” *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, November 23, 1989), <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/23/us/transcript-of-president-s-speech-on-relations-between-the-east-and-west.html>.

¹⁷³ Sorenson, *Shutting Down the Cold War*, 96

Jersey, however the move was eventually averted with the creation of official BRAC legislation in 1990. The Fort's surrounding community remained largely unfazed by the impending reality of de-escalation throughout the late 1980s. On December 29, 1988, *The Star* reported that Fort McClellan was "spared today from a proposal that includes the closing of 86 U.S. military bases at a savings of \$5.6 billion over the next 20 years." "We're pleased that we were not on the list," Joe Carter, media relations officer for Fort McClellan was quoted saying, "I never thought anything was going to change."¹⁷⁴

Community confidence surrounding the permanence of Fort McClellan came from the base's unique role in the Army's domestic infrastructure. In contrast from many other bases considered for closure in the previous round, McClellan boasted its distinguished chemical warfare program, a facet of the Army with particular importance in the 1990s. In August of 1990, Saddam Hussein's Iraq had invaded Kuwait in attempts to expand its global power and gain control of the small nation's vast oil reserves. Iraq's invasion not only presented a threat to American economic interests in the oil market, but was made even more concerning by Hussein's possession of biological and chemical weapons. Americans everywhere feared the fatal consequences of unprecedentedly dangerous weapons held by one of the world's most belligerent leaders.

Seven thousand miles away, however, this terrifying reality in Iraq signaled a new world of possibility for Alabama. On October 21, 1990, *The Star* ran a front-page story with the headline "Iraqi threat 'good' for Fort future."¹⁷⁵ "Now that we're facing the Iraqis across the ocean, chemicals have become more important," *The Star* quoted Jack Edwards, an Alabama lawyer,

¹⁷⁴ "Bases proposals to have minimal impact in area," *The Anniston Star*, December 29, 1988, p. 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106464781>

¹⁷⁵ "Iraqi threat 'good' for Fort future," *The Anniston Star*, October 21, 1990.

saying. “With the chemical school at Fort McClellan, Anniston’s in much better shape than it was.” Surely, Edwards reported to *The Star*, McClellan’s unique history in chemical weapons training and its formidable infrastructure in this realm would save it from closure upon BRAC’s resurgence. This argument surrounding chemical warfare preparedness would remain salient throughout BRAC’s many rounds.

It would only be for a fleeting moment, however, that Edwards’s premonition would hold true. A few months after the 1988 round of base closures was approved, whispers of another round began to circulate throughout the country’s remaining military communities. The base closure process was formally standardized by the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990. The Act called for the creation of an independent commission “appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.”¹⁷⁶ In this process, the Secretary of Defense forwarded his or her recommendations for realignments and closures to a Commission made up of military, government, and business leaders; the Commission heard various testimonies from affected communities; the Commission sent its final list to the President, who either approved or disapproved the list in its entirety; and Congress, then, received the opportunity to approve or disapprove the entire list. If Congress did not vote either way within 45 days, the list would automatically pass.

Desires by legislators to remain “distant” and “removed” from the politicized issue of base closure were deeply implicated in the new legislation. In order to avoid much of the political maneuvering that tilted the 1988 BRAC round in favor of some regions and against others, BRAC Chair James Courter expanded the closure consideration process. In 1991, five hearings on the various bases were held in Washington, D.C., along with eight others across the country.

¹⁷⁶ Congress.gov, "H.R.4739 - 101st Congress (1989-1990): National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991," November 5, 1990. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/4739>.

BRAC members heard testimonies from communities with installations on the list, visited sites, and spoke with local residents. A service base-evaluation process was also introduced which categorized bases by function and used a computer algorithm to calculate the “military importance” of each site.¹⁷⁷ The Army edited the final computerized ranking, but its reliance on the mechanized process allowed it to further distance itself from decisions which would ultimately imperil livelihoods and destabilize entire local economies from Alabama to California to Michigan.

In the 1991 BRAC round, the Army recommended closing Fort McClellan completely and moving McClellan’s Chemical School and Military Police Academy to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri. The Defense Polygraph School, another mission of McClellan’s, would be moved to Fort Huachuca in Arizona. Most importantly, the Army recommended shutting down completely the Chemical Decontamination Training Facility (CDTF) at McClellan, a proposal that would serve as the Alabama delegation’s most salient point in fighting for continued operations at the Fort.¹⁷⁸

McClellan’s long history of chemical weapons storage and training would become indispensable in debates around base closure. Chemical warfare training at McClellan could be traced back to the First World War, when troops practiced advanced chemical warfare tactics in model trenches.¹⁷⁹ Chemical weapons training at Fort McClellan, which had occurred for decades prior to the CDTF’s opening in 1987, presented a long, clear environmental hazard to Northeast Alabama. Before the Army constructed the CDTF, years of live agent chemical training occurred in open fields throughout the base, including “open-air detonation [and]

¹⁷⁷ Sorenson, *Shutting Down the Cold War*, 98

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 105

¹⁷⁹ Patrick McCreless, “McClellan Iron Mountain Road project facing delay,” *The Anniston Star*, September 24, 2015, p. 7, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/141771643/>

employment and disposal of virtually every chemical agent that has existed in the U.S. arsenal.”¹⁸⁰ Because of the uncontrolled dispersal of chemical weapons across the Fort’s terrain, Fort McClellan could not be efficiently or easily cleaned up and transitioned for commercial, agricultural, industrial, residential, or recreational purposes. “Because exact records were not kept of where all the open-air testing of chemical weapons occurred, nor of the quantities used or wind levels at the time,” Alabama Senator Howell Heflin implored in his testimony to the 1991 BRAC commission, “this is a real risk.”

The fatal nature of the chemicals harbored by the Fort served not as a push for their removal, but rather as a pull for their retention. The Chemical Decontamination Training Facility’s unique mission, Heflin argued, had a continued—and arguably increased—importance in the post-Cold War years and could not be replicated elsewhere in the United States. The Army intended on moving chemical warfare training to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, a proposal that Heflin purported would be impossible due to “growing environmental restrictions and the lack of community acceptance” at any other location.¹⁸¹ Annistonians, Heflin contended, were hardworking patriots who supported their local military base despite this danger. The Army could maintain its critical—yet hazardous—operation in Anniston with formidable public support due to the benefits it brought to the local economy. However, if the base is to be closed and becomes thousands of acres of fenced-off, contaminated land, “the people in the surrounding areas will have lost their community spirit and support for Fort McClellan. There is no question they will resent the Army’s decision to close the base,” he said. Heflin also foreshadowed pressure from a growing environmental movement that would generate negative publicity for the

¹⁸⁰ Howell Testimony to BRAC Commission, MSS.0028, BOX: BP.001, FOLDER: Base Closure – Ft. McClellan, Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

DOD. “It is not unrealistic to anticipate a ‘60 Minutes’ show on the dangers of ‘Old Fort McClellan’ and the Army’s neglect of its self-made problems,” he added. With these serious environmental consequences, the Senator argued, no other location would want to host these operations, making a relocation of the CDTF difficult. “The presence on a base of a unique mission characteristic that cannot be replicated elsewhere,” he said, “is sufficient to remove a base from consideration for closure.”¹⁸² Annistonians, however, facing dismal economic prospects, would eagerly retain the weapons. The deadly operation was, in many ways, one of the only economic forces keeping Anniston alive.

In addition to the purported issue of relocating a dangerous chemical weapons training program, questions of costs and benefits played a large role in considerations of base closure. Under the Comprehensive Environmental Restoration, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was given the power to seek out entities responsible for “uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous-waste sites as well as accidents, spills, and other emergency releases of pollutants and contaminants into the environment” and ensure prompt and proper clean-up.¹⁸³ CERCLA required the Army address all environmental contamination at its sites, many of which were riddled with significant pollution. However, CERCLA projects were funded on a priority basis, making it such that there was insufficient funding to address high-priority contamination emergencies as well as the many closing military bases requiring clean-up at the same time. Prompted by a lack of funding, the Department of Defense added a provision to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991

¹⁸² Howell Testimony to BRAC Commission, MSS.0028, BOX: BP.001, FOLDER: Base Closure – Ft. McClellan, Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

¹⁸³ “Summary of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (Superfund).” EPA. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Accessed November 11, 2021. <https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-comprehensive-environmental-response-compensation-and-liability-act>.

superimposing immediacy onto the environmental clean-up of bases. This allowed the DOD to circumvent the CERCLA process, treating base closures as immediate, pressing sites in need of clean-up and garnering restoration funds. The Act read, “environmental restoration of any property made excess to the needs of the Department of Defense as a result of such closure or realignment be carried out as soon as possible with funds available for such purpose.”¹⁸⁴ This made it such that the DOD was presented with an immediate legal responsibility to address environmental hazards left at shuttered military installations.

This legislation surrounding CERCLA and the DOD had important implications in the fight to keep Fort McClellan off the BRAC list. Fort McClellan was expected to have a resale value of approximately \$50 million in 1991, a high figure that amounted to nearly twice the sales price per acre of land surrounding the base.¹⁸⁵ On the surface, this high resale value marked sufficient reasoning—at least economically—to close the base. However, as Heflin testified to the Commission, the estimated clean-up cost of the Fort would be more than four times its value, at \$236 million. Howell even charged that \$236 million was inaccurately low due to imprecise estimation tactics employed by the Army (the Army had calculated the costs of clean up using a model based on Fort Meade, Maryland, a site which had experienced almost no chemical contamination). The DOD, therefore, had imprecisely calculated the clean-up costs at the base, which it would be responsible for urgently addressing upon McClellan’s closure due to the environmental legislation. With the legislative responsibility of clean-up falling on the Army, any assertions of financial savings were altogether inaccurate and misleading.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Congress.gov, "H.R.4739 - 101st Congress (1989-1990): National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991," November 5, 1990. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/4739>.

¹⁸⁵ Howell Testimony to BRAC Commission, MSS.0028, BOX: BP.001, FOLDER: Base Closure – Ft. McClellan, Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

National security concerns and military preparedness, too, animated the debate over McClellan's possible closure, as they had for decades prior. Closing McClellan and shuttering the CDTF, Heflin argued in his testimony, presented a reckless and irresponsible risk to America's soldiers. Many in favor of shuttering the base argued that the CDTF could be closed and reactivated if necessary, a more economical decision than continuing its operation. However, McClellan's activists drew on estimates made by the DOD itself that the cost of reactivation would range between \$4 million and \$7 million dollars and would take between three and five years.¹⁸⁷ "Just as the price of freedom is constant vigilance, so too the price of performance is constant training," Heflin said. "I was certain our troops could handle a chemical attack when I voted with the President to authorize the use of force in the Middle East."¹⁸⁸ Without McClellan, Heflin argued, they would be rendered defenseless. Testimonies by chemical weapons experts further bolstered Heflin's assertions. The experts concurred with Alabama's delegation, stating that chemical decontamination training was critical for national security and that either McClellan's CDTF should remain open or another facility should be built elsewhere. The Army had no such plans to build a new CDTF at a different site.

Additionally salient were the economic and political implications base closure would have on Northeast Alabama, especially in the wake of continued deindustrialization in the American South—and Alabama specifically. By 1991, about 1,300 people had been laid off from the Goodyear plant in Gadsden "because of a combination of dropping profits for the company, a decline in bias tire production and other factors."¹⁸⁹ In September 1992, Key Foundry—a

¹⁸⁷ Sorenson, *Shutting Down the Cold War*, 105

¹⁸⁸ Howell Testimony to BRAC Commission, MSS.0028, BOX: BP.001, FOLDER: Base Closure – Ft. McClellan, Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

¹⁸⁹ Michael Rodgers, "A Look at Goodyear's Long History in Gadsden," *The Gadsden Times*, May 9, 2020, <https://www.gadsdentimes.com/story/news/local/2020/05/09/look-at-goodyears-long-history-in-gadsden/1220207007/>.

subsidiary of Weider Health and Fitness Inc., which manufactured barbells, dumbbells, pipe fittings, and sewer grates—closed up shop.¹⁹⁰ Key became the sixth Calhoun County company to close or announce major layoffs in a span of four months, bringing the number of recently unemployed county residents to 430. With the continued shriveling of Anniston’s industrial economy, increased dependency on jobs at and around the Fort made fears of base closure even more menacing. As Deborah B. Parks, a resident of Anniston, suggested in *The Star*, “Although I have a personal interest in Fort McClellan staying open, this proposal is not just applicable to this area. It would apply to any small town which may suffer economically with the closure of these bases.”¹⁹¹

Lobbying from Heflin, chemical warfare experts, and various other members of the Alabama delegation would ultimately save Fort McClellan from closure in 1991. The Gulf War proved to Americans that chemical weapons presented a clear danger in modern warfare, a risk McClellan’s CDTF was uniquely equipped to handle. Moreover, McClellan’s advocates were able to successfully counter the Army’s arguments that closing the Fort would be financially advantageous, as environmental contamination and the potential costs of moving the chemical operation proved extensive. On July 1, 1991, *The Star* reported, “Making [McClellan] a winner took [months] of work, persistence, a fair amount of luck, and the generous contributions of Saddam Hussein.”¹⁹²

Reactions of Northeast Alabama residents, both directly and indirectly connected to Fort McClellan, reflected joy and momentary relief. “I think lots of people were sitting on their

¹⁹⁰ Frederick Burger, “Anniston’s key foundry closes shop,” *The Anniston Star*, September 14, 1992, p. 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106525880>

¹⁹¹ “Speaker’s stand: Fort facilities,” *The Anniston Star*, May 18, 1991, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106637431/>

¹⁹² “How the Fort campaign was won,” *The Anniston Star*, July 1, 1991, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106487170/>

money waiting to see what was going to happen to the fort,” said Steve Loggins, assistant manager of a Wal-Mart in Jacksonville, a town a few miles north of Anniston. “This will be a big shot in the arm for the local economy,” said Anniston Assistant City Manager Sam Gaston. Linda Thompson, employee at McClellan for sixteen years, said “I wanted it to stay not just because my job is here, but because this place is beautiful and an asset to the area.” Anniston resident Irma Mitchell said simply, “Well, praise the Lord.”

Anniston’s relief would be momentary, however, as the Department of Defense was already planning the 1993 BRAC round by the time 1991’s decisions were settled.¹⁹³ In March of 1993, Defense Secretary Les Aspin proposed the shutdown of 31 major military bases and the realignment of 134 others. Base closures, Aspin asserted to the American public in an official statement, had failed to keep pace with the Clinton administration’s expansive goals for demobilization and budget cuts. The 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union—as well as a domestic political climate which increasingly detested government spending and favored austerity—served as an impetus for further de-escalation by the Pentagon. “Resources are drained into bases we don’t need, and therefore are not available to buy the things we need,” Aspin said.¹⁹⁴

Fort McClellan again sat at the top of Aspin’s list. The Pentagon recommended closing the base, with one exception of keeping open the Chemical Defense Training Facility. The Military Police School, Chemical School, and Defense Department Polygraph Institute would be transferred to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, and Pelham Range would be handed over to the Alabama Army National Guard. With the closure of McClellan, the region was expected to lose

¹⁹³ Sorenson, *Shutting down the Cold War*, 129

¹⁹⁴ David Usborne, “Pentagon Lists US Bases to Be Axed,” *The Independent* (Independent Digital News and Media, March 13, 1993), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/pentagon-lists-us-bases-to-be-axed-1497328.html>.

6,017 military and 2,074 civilian jobs at a savings of \$31 million per year for the federal government.¹⁹⁵

The proposal by the Pentagon to close McClellan while keeping open the CDTF presented a unique challenge for Alabama's delegation, which once again found itself mobilizing to save the base. In 1991, McClellan's advocates had been able to capitalize on the strategic importance of the CDTF as ammunition to keep the Fort off of the base closure list. Rebuilding the facility elsewhere, they argued, would be costly and ineffective and would be met by substantial protests in a new location. In this round, however, the Pentagon proposed retaining the CDTF at McClellan, separating it from the Army Chemical School which would be moved to Missouri, and shuttering the rest of the installation. "Now," *The Star* reported, "the case for the fort may be less clear-cut — centering on the cost-effectiveness of the Pentagon's proposal and the impact of separating the chemical school from the CDTF."¹⁹⁶

With BRAC's second rendition, Anniston's leaders used lessons from 1991 to approach the 1993 battle more effectively. In light of the 1993 round, the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce created the Fort McClellan-Anniston Army Depot Community Task Force. The Chamber of Commerce planned to spend \$150,000 via the Task Force to hire attorneys and consultants in the fight against base closure. By March 12, \$50,000 had already been pledged by the Chamber and the city of Anniston itself planned to contribute \$40,000 more.¹⁹⁷ In a local economy already suffering from public and private disinvestment, limited public funds were being used to grasp onto the area's most critical—and most transient—economic player.

¹⁹⁵ "A Fight for the Fort," *The Anniston Star*, March 12, 1991, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106723335/>

¹⁹⁶ "A Fight for the Fort," *The Anniston Star*, March 12, 1991, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106723335/>

¹⁹⁷ Frederick Burger, "Area leaders say closure of Fort still not inevitable," *The Anniston Star*, March 12, 1993, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106723376/>

With this in mind, McClellan's advocates drew upon miscalculations in the Army's economic proposal, this time in the context of separating the chemical school and the CDTF. By 1993, it had become nearly indisputable fact that the CDTF must remain in operation in the wake of modern chemical warfare. *The Star* reported that by the Army's own calculations, running the CDTF as a standalone facility under this new plan would more than double its annual operating costs from \$4.6 million to \$10.2 million. The CDTF would still need a staff of 90, requiring an annual payroll of several million dollars. The cost alone of shuttling chemical trainees from the Chemical School at Fort Leonard Wood to the standalone CDTF at McClellan would amount to \$1.7 million. Beyond these economic miscalculations, questions quickly emerged regarding whether separating the two programs would hinder chemical defense training.¹⁹⁸

In addresses to Congress, Heflin capitalized on this strategic importance of McClellan's chemical training program. "There are 22 nations all together that have trained in Fort McClellan in the past on chemical warfare and it's essential that we have standardized equipment and we have standardized training," he implored in June of 1993.¹⁹⁹ This factor became even more salient in 1993 as the United States entered into the Chemical Weapons Convention, an arms control treaty administered by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The treaty was designed as a step towards a worldwide ban on chemical and biological weapons, under which the United States was mandated to help any signatory country under the threat of a chemical attack. In the eyes of McClellan's advocates, this was only further ammunition to keep the CDTF and Chemical School together at the Fort. Representative Glen

¹⁹⁸ "Fight for the Fort: the next round," *The Anniston Star*, March 12, 1991, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106723376/>

¹⁹⁹ Heflin Brings in the Marines to Support McClellan and Tax Package, 6-21-93, MSS.0028, Box po.001 Press Audio Tapes, Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

Browder, a major player in the efforts against closure who represented Alabama's third Congressional district from 1989 through 1997, is quoted in *The Star* saying, "Closure of Fort McClellan would signal to the world that the United States is not serious in its commitment to uphold the provisions of the [convention]." ²⁰⁰

Anniston's fight to retain McClellan reflected another great issue facing military communities in the wake of base closure—the possible rollback of benefits allotted for servicemembers and veterans. Around the time McClellan was slated for closure in 1993, the base had an estimated \$225.8 million per year impact on the local economy, supporting many families who had made homes in its proximity. ²⁰¹ Brenda Jones, a resident of Weaver, another city in Calhoun County, was employed as an accounting technician at the Fort and expected to lose her job if the base closed. While she would ideally move in search of new work, she told *The Star*, she had two elderly parents in the area in need of care. Additionally, her family would not be able to survive without the healthcare benefits they received through McClellan due to her husband's veteran status. Anniston had long prided itself on being a destination community for military retirees. At the time of the 1993 BRAC round, approximately 69,000 retirees, dependents, and widows in the region relied on Fort McClellan's Noble Hospital for healthcare. ²⁰² If the Fort closed, this population was slated to lose access to wide-ranging health services. Moreover, the costs of transferring these individuals to civilian health care providers would amount to over \$242 million over a fifteen-year period. This was a cost the federal government would have to bear, which it was not accurately calculating into its cost-benefit

²⁰⁰ "A Fight for the Fort," *The Anniston Star*, March 12, 1991, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106723335/>

²⁰¹ "Alabama Base Statistics" *The Anniston Star*, March 13, 1993, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106723510/>

²⁰² Heflin Testimony to Base Closure Commission in D.C., 6-14-93, MSS.0028, Box po.001 Press Audio Tapes, Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

analysis of closing the Fort.²⁰³ Oliver Dodd, a former Navy lieutenant, moved to Jacksonville, another Calhoun County municipality, in 1989 after his retirement because of the nearby Fort. A father and a husband with a small insurance business, Dodd had built a comfortable life in Jacksonville's military community, bolstered by the benefits he received through McClellan as a veteran. While Dodd would be "stuck with a house that couldn't sell" if McClellan closed, there was "no doubt" he would move. "I'm not going to be where I'm not going to get the benefits that I have earned," he told *The Star*.²⁰⁴ This issue of veterans' benefits was notable for the Alabama delegation, given that Fort Leonard Wood, the supposed site to which McClellan's schools would be moved, had little to no veteran community.

With the second round of base closures, Annistonians began not only to fear the short-term possibility of closure, but also for the long-range outlook of a regional economy clouded by uncertainty and instability. Without McClellan, many believed that other industrial employers would be unlikely to invest in the area—one that had already lost so much of its historic manufacturing presence. Annistonians foresaw a dismal future marked by population loss, business closure, decreases in property value, and rampant economic disinvestment. In his 1993 testimony to the Commission, Senator Heflin reflected these sentiments. "This is the third year, third time that they've been faced with the prospect of closing. And Fort McClellan has certainly suffered more than double jeopardy. The people of Anniston have been held hostage by the base closure process. They fear for the future," he implored, adding, "It's uncertain whether anyone

²⁰³ Health Costs Not Included in Cost to Close Fort McClellan, 6-22-93, MSS.0028, Box po.001 Press Audio Tapes, Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

²⁰⁴ "Retirees, employees depend on McClellan," *The Anniston Star*, March 13, 1993, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106723516>

would move in and invest in an area so crowded by economic uncertainty and it's at a standstill.”²⁰⁵

Unlike previous fights against closure, the looming uncertainty of 1993 pushed some actors in Calhoun County to quietly air suggestions of preparing for a future that did not include Fort McClellan at all. The day after the Commission announced the 1993 round, *The Star* reported “some erosion” in the community’s will to fight against McClellan’s closure. Anniston and the surrounding area had now undergone the brutal BRAC process twice (in addition to the closure consideration in 1988)—an ordeal that depleted the finances, and moral, of the region. George Douthit, Mayor of Jacksonville, said, “It takes a lot of money to put up a fight to defend the fort out here every two years...This thing’s killing us. It’s coming up too often. I mean how many times can we do this?”²⁰⁶

Waning public support for defense spending in the 1990s, too, would not bode well for Anniston. By 1990, 43 percent of Americans felt the U.S. was spending “too much” on the military, compared to 11 percent ten years prior.²⁰⁷ While the 1991 BRAC round—occurring in the midst of an alarming conflict in the Middle East—came as a shock, the 1993 round arrived more as an omen of the times to come. Joel Carter, president of United Savings Bank, told *The Star*, “We’ve got to let our plight be known, try not to have the base close, but I do think it would be prudent for the leadership of the county to direct itself to what will replace the fort.” Former Anniston City Councilman Sam Stewart concurred, saying, “We need to look at the next step.

²⁰⁵ Heflin Testimony to Base Closure Commission in D.C., MSS.0028, BOX: po.001 Press Audio Tapes, Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

²⁰⁶ “Retirees, employees depend on McClellan,” *The Anniston Star*, March 13, 1993, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106723516>

²⁰⁷ Thomas Hartley and Bruce Russett, “Public Opinion and the Common Defense: Who Governs Military Spending in the United States?,” *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 4 (1992): pp. 905-915, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1964343>, 909.

It's a mistake to squander our time and money on fighting something that's inevitable and is part of a spending reduction plan that people basically support."²⁰⁸ A few weeks after the BRAC Commission announced the 1993 closures, Defense Secretary Les Aspin released a statement on President Clinton's plans for defense de-escalation, writing, "President Clinton has stressed that America's economic strength is central to its security. Consistent with U.S. military needs and declining threats, defense spending will be cut, which will help reduce the deficit and provide funds to invest for economic growth. The Administration will seek to redirect to domestic needs any defense assets—bases, industries and personnel—rendered redundant by the Cold War."²⁰⁹

In a prepared statement following the announcement of the 1993 list, Representative Glen Browder warned Annistonians about possible impending changes. "We must be realistic," he said, "Today's action moves Fort McClellan a giant step towards closure. We have a responsibility to provide leadership for the possibility of a future without Fort McClellan."²¹⁰ A new future for American military infrastructure—backed by increasing public support for de-escalation—was on the horizon, and Northeast Alabama would not be spared.

A future without McClellan, however, would be held off one more time. On June 24, 1993, after testimonies in Washington, D.C., site visits to Anniston, and much impassioned lobbying by the Alabama delegation, the 1993 BRAC Commission rejected the Pentagon's recommendation to close Fort McClellan. The front page of the *Anniston Star* boldly proclaimed, "Area breathes sigh of relief over vote."²¹¹ Ultimately, the BRAC Commission feared the

²⁰⁸ "Retirees, employees depend on McClellan," *The Anniston Star*, March 13, 1993, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106723516>

²⁰⁹ Melissa Healy, "Clinton Defense Budget Cuts Into Troops, Ships," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1993, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-03-27-mn-15800-story.html>.

²¹⁰ "Many cry in pain as list is released" *The Anniston Star*, March 12, 1993, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106723383>

²¹¹ "Area breathes sigh of relief over vote" *The Anniston Star*, June 24, 1993, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106705842/>

possible harm that would arise from separating the Chemical School and the CDTF. As the Commission heard final arguments and cast their votes, Alabama's northeast corner held its breath. At Courthouse Cafe, a local diner, the lunch crowd sat in silence, eyes glued to the television behind the counter. Groups of workers at McClellan gathered together in conference rooms, watching a hearing that would determine the fate of their jobs. Howie Grant, owner of five Domino's Pizza outlets which received much business from the Fort, called the news a "present." Jan Holcombe, who worked for First Alabama Bank's Fort McClellan branch and whose husband worked for the Fort's primary maintenance contractor, told *The Star*, "I think it's wonderful. I can't imagine it not being here. It's been here all my life."²¹²

²¹² "Area breathes sigh of relief over vote" *The Anniston Star*, June 24, 1993, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106705842/>



Photo by Eddie Motes, the *Anniston Star*

By late 1993, conversations in Calhoun County began to shift away from the fight for base retention and towards the necessity for a new economic model altogether—one built on a business much more stable than that of global war. Sandra Grimes, owner of a local shoe store near the base, told *The Star*, “I hope it never comes up again, but to me, I think they are going to. I believe that it will close the next time.” George Monk, a local attorney, expressed relief on the day of the Commission’s vote, however not without apprehension. “What I’m hearing is we are going to be here again in ’95,” he said.²¹³ Signs had begun to point for a different future for

²¹³ “Area breathes sigh of relief over vote” *The Anniston Star*, June 24, 1993, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106705842/>

Calhoun County, one without its largest employer and cultural anchor. Some residents acted on this apprehension, hoping to soften what they saw as an inevitable blow of base closure. Howie Grant opened a Dominoes outlet in Birmingham to diversify his regional investments.²¹⁴ Others, however, clung on to the lives they had built around McClellan. Many had no choice, as their employment, healthcare, leisure, housing, and community were all built around the institution.

To no surprise, in November 1994, the *Gadsden Times* reported once again that McClellan would likely be a target for the next round of base closures and realignments.²¹⁵ The 1995 BRAC round—the third and final round outlined in the legislation which created the BRAC process—would be far more sweeping than the previous two. BRAC’s original legislation mandated the closure of 30 percent of existing domestic military bases by the end of the three closure rounds. The 1991 and 1993 rounds, however, had only closed 15 percent of existing bases, leaving 15 percent to be closed in 1995. Additionally, the 1995 round would be steeped in further controversy as the negative consequences of the DOD’s previous closure rounds had begun to show, exhibiting to Americans the pain that would come when the bases in their regions were ultimately targeted and shuttered.²¹⁶

On February 28, 1995, the Department of Defense released its official recommendations for the latest and largest round of base closures and realignments. Fort McClellan was once slated again for closure, a plan designed to save the army \$316 million over the following five years. The closure would cost the region 8,563 jobs—2,441 civilian and 6,122 military. The Army also estimated that Calhoun County could indirectly lose an additional 2,184 jobs over the five years

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ “Anniston bases: The hit-list again,” *The Gadsden Times*, November 18, 1994. SG24005, Box 1, Folder 40, Alabama Governor Collection, Press Office Division, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama, United States.

²¹⁶ Sorenson, *Shutting Down the Cold War*, 159-160.

following base closure, a 17.3 percent loss of the area's employment.²¹⁷ The Army Chemical School and Military Police Schools would be moved, once again, to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri and the Defense Polygraph Institute would relocate to Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

McClellan's local community found itself steeped in many of the same grievances that had marked closure efforts throughout the 1990s, and the base's history at large. Residents lamented the impact that the closure would have on the local economy, the inefficiency of moving the operations to other sites, and the risk the closure posed for national security. Kya Son, owner of Kee's Tailor Shop in Anniston, received almost 90 percent of her business from the Fort. She expressed apprehension about the future, telling *The Star* she was unsure of what she would do next in the wake of a shutdown. Marty McCary, owner of a local airbrush painting business, said that while the closure of the Fort would not put him completely out of business, it would do enough damage such that he would relocate his family to Florida. K.C. Walfield, owner of McClellan Flower Shop on the base, said, "There are no jobs around here, so there are no other options. I'll be on the unemployment line." She added, "It doesn't make much sense...I hope we fight this thing. They don't care about the little people like us. It's not fair."²¹⁸

Again, leaning on the strategic importance of McClellan's chemical weapons program, the Alabama delegation situated the Fort in the context of recent chemical gas attacks in Tokyo, Japan. On March 20, Tokyo had experienced a deadly terrorist attack with poison sarin gas, stoking international fears about chemical terrorism. Shortly after, Heflin wrote a letter to Secretary of Defense William Perry, further outlining the pressing national security threat. "Our own nation is almost completely unprepared to deal with an urban, non-combat release of poison

²¹⁷ "Pentagon: Shut Fort" *The Anniston Star*, February 8, 1995, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115573708/>

²¹⁸ "New List Brings Gloom to Merchants" *The Anniston Star*, March 1, 1995, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115573708/>

gas,” Heflin argued in his letter. He went on to list three demands for the Pentagon that would mitigate threat of a Tokyo-like incident on U.S. soil: protect the U.S. Army’s chemical warfare program by withdrawing plans to close McClellan, enlarge the chemical training program to include civilian first responders, and invest in advanced technology to further the efficiency of this mission. Closing the chemical school at Ft. McClellan only made “a statement to would-be terrorists that we are unprepared,” Heflin said.²¹⁹ A few days later, *The Star* further capitalized on the Japanese attack, shaming the Army for “[closing] Fort McClellan and [disrupting] chemical warfare training at the very same time terrorists are planting nerve agent in the Tokyo subway and old foe Iran is equipping the Strait of Hormuz with chemical weapons of war.”²²⁰

As it became increasingly clear that Fort Leonard Wood would likely inherit McClellan’s chemical weapons training program, McClellan’s advocates drew on the inability for Leonard Wood to appropriately house such a dangerous operation. As the *Birmingham News* highlighted, it took years for Fort McClellan to obtain proper permits to operate a chemical school, “and this is Alabama,” the *News* added, “where environmental concerns haven’t been among the state’s top priorities.”²²¹ In 1993, the BRAC Commission had ultimately rejected the Pentagon’s proposal to move McClellan’s chemical operations to Fort Leonard Wood because the Missouri base did not have the proper permits to build a new live agent training facility. For the 1995 round, it was mandated that all necessary environmental permits must be pursued before the Pentagon submitted recommendations to close or realign a facility. This, however, would not

²¹⁹ Letter to Perry: McClellan–Japan Attack 3/21/95, MSS.0028, Box SM.11 (January 1995 through June 1995), Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

²²⁰ “Strait jacket: A case for McClellan” *The Anniston Star*, March 24, 1995, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/107199318>

²²¹ “Here we go again,” *The Birmingham News*, February 28, 1995. SG24010, Box 6, Folder 43, Alabama Governor Collection, Press Office Division, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama, United States.

quite come to fruition. While the Pentagon recommended the Chemical School's move from McClellan to Leonard Wood in February 1995, the BRAC Commission allowed Fort Leonard Wood to take until June 22 to secure proper operating permits from the state of Missouri. For the Alabama delegation, this signaled that the Army did not intend to prioritize national security and financial efficiency, but rather was again falling victim to pork barrel politics. Notably, two of the eight BRAC commissioners were from Missouri, Fort Leonard Wood's home state: former Democratic Senator and St. Louis lawyer Alan J. Dixon and chair of the board of St. Louis banking firm Kling Rechter & Company, S. Lee Kling. In a statement to the *Birmingham News* on the issue of permits, Howell Heflin said, "The situation will be quite different when efforts are made to get the necessary permits for storing hazardous materials and for operating the facility in Missouri. Both these permits require public hearings and surveys such as environmental impact studies."²²² Heflin argued that because the Missouri delegation had not followed through in their duties to obtain proper permits, Missourians did not fully understand the risks they would incur in taking on the facility.

Despite months of advocacy, on June 24, 1995, days after Heflin's final testimony, the BRAC Commission would vote to close Fort McClellan permanently.²²³ The U.S. Army Chemical and Military Police Schools would be sent to Fort Leonard Wood upon receipt of the proper permits. The Defense Polygraph Institute went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Pelham Range was leased to the Alabama National Guard. Many in the community pointed to the influence of the two Missourians on the BRAC Commission as to why the vote ultimately sent

²²² Heflin submits further support for McClellan June 19, 1995, MSS.0028, Box SM.11 (January 1995 through June 1995), Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

²²³ "Heflin's statement for B'ham News permits for moving chemical school," April 12, 1995, MSS.0028, Box SM.11, Howell Thomas Heflin Collection, The University of Alabama School of Law Bounds Law Library, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States.

much of McClellan to their state. This sentiment was fueled specifically by the fact that proper permits had not been acquired before decisions were approved to conduct such a move. “That was sad. So overt,” Chip Howell recalled, “[The closure] really tainted me from the perspective of Washington that everybody is just out for themselves and it's not for what's good for the country. Because there were times, and there still are times, when our troops aren't trained appropriately because they're not here.”

“Combat fatigue kicks in: bitter defeat stuns battle-weary community leaders,” read the front page of *The Star*. “Area economy now faces ‘biggest test ever.’”²²⁴ *Star* writer Tim Pryor described Anniston’s mayor David Dethrage, deflated and demoralized, stepping out of the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce, eyes reddened, to smoke a cigarette. “My prayer was that God’s will would be done,” Dethrage told *The Star*, “If we acknowledge that and work with what we’ve been given, we’ll be fine.” The paper listed all the ways McClellan’s closure would drain the region: home values would plummet, unemployment would run rampant, businesses would close, and schools would shutter as families moved their children elsewhere. “It’s going to have a hell of an impact,” said local restaurant owner Jim Lorenzo, “[Anniston] is going to be a ghost town.”²²⁵

Base closures in the 1990s were marketed to the American people as a public good with the equally distributable output of cost-effective national security. With increased closures and realignments of personnel-heavy military bases—an antiquated form of defense infrastructure—more money could be poured into the technological forms of war that had risen in popularity in the 1970s and 80s. Investing in aerospace programs, automated weapons, and computerized defense systems, politicians argued, would help keep all Americans safer, while lightening the

²²⁴ “Taps for Fort” *The Anniston Star*, June 24, 1995, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106572194/>

²²⁵ Ibid.

burden on their wallets. While this benefit of technological, personnel-light increased security in the age of advancing warfare supposedly reached all Americans, the costs of the same process would not be so equally doled out. While corporate giants and affluent, highly-skilled workers prospered in this new landscape, former military regions like Northeast Alabama bore the brunt of de-escalation. Local municipal systems suddenly found themselves unable to handle the confounding economic, social, and political consequences of base closure. The proliferation of military bases in the Southern U.S., too, subsequently made it such that losses in the face of base closure in the post-Cold War years disproportionately impacted the region. In an area where economies were already declining due to deindustrialization, these effects were particularly destructive. Due to their manufacturing and agricultural backgrounds, Southern municipalities like Anniston were ill-equipped to attract new, high-tech service sector employment in place of military installations.²²⁶

A city that had once been a beacon of patriotism and loyalty to the Armed Forces began to show cracks in its unwavering allegiance. *The Star* quoted local nurse Lynn Moore, who lamented the “sheer greed that allows others to take away what little economy a rural area has” and the “stupidity” of closing “down a functioning chemical training facility (the only one in the world).”²²⁷ D. B. Parks, another resident of the region, said that while he had “always trusted the Army and our government leaders to do what is fair and honorable,” he had “never seen anything so unfair or totally biased as how the decision on the disposition of Fort McClellan, Alabama has been handled.” Fourteen-year-old Julie Rockholz, whose father was stationed at McClellan, offered her testimony, writing, “Our family is only one of the many families that will be torn

²²⁶ Touchton and Ashley, *Salvaging Community*, 42-43.

²²⁷ “Hanging out the ‘closed’ sign at Ft. McClellan,” *The Anniston Star*, June 29, 1995

apart, ripped up, and shipped off by the military.”²²⁸ Public sentiments of anger permeated Calhoun County as a bleak picture emerged for the area’s immediate future. Many of these dismal predictions would soon come true. Phillip Tutor, who lived through the closure, recalls “The part of Anniston [closest to McClellan] was absolutely affected. Restaurants, shopping centers, laundromats, barbershops, tattoo parlors, all these hotels—mom and pop hotels—all went out of business. [Jacksonville and Weaver] ...experienced was a dramatic drop in school attendance. Quite a few of their students were military kids, sons and daughters of career military men and women who were stationed at McClellan. They lived off post and they went to school in either Weaver or Jacksonville, because that was the nearest, best public schools.”²²⁹ Anniston’s economic and social fabric began to unravel in the absence of its base.

Despite the crushing disappointment the 1995 decision brought, it was met with limited surprise. Previous BRAC rounds had signaled to local residents that closure was on the horizon, prompting many to begin considering a future without the base. Rather than cling to McClellan, some local leaders and residents began to imagine expansive redevelopment plans for the regional economy. On March 1, during the BRAC consideration process, *The Star’s* editorial page called for “some next-day perspective, please.”²³⁰ The paper lamented “out-of-town media” for exaggerating possible economic losses and instilling a sense of despair into the local economy. “This is not a disaster site,” the paper argued, “We are not helpless before some unyielding natural phenomenon.” While Fort McClellan was slated to lose approximately 8,000 jobs under 1995 realignments, the Army Depot was slated to gain 1,000 jobs, helping to insulate the economy from this budget reduction. Additionally, the paper noted various other sectors

²²⁸ “Hanging out the ‘closed’ sign at Ft. McClellan,” *The Anniston Star*, June 29, 1995

²²⁹ Phillip Tutor, interview by Denali Sagner, June 16, 2021, Anniston, Alabama.

²³⁰ “Fort Grief: Economic perspective,” *The Anniston Star*, March 1, 1995, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/107197489>

bolstering the regional economy: “a major cable plant in Helfin, a world class tourist magnet of golfing near the Etowah County line and plant expansions that include the recent addition of a corporate headquarters by an aerospace firm.” Past closure threats had prompted some economic diversification, helping to soften the inevitable blow 1995’s BRAC round would bring.²³¹

Another editorial in *The Star* called for economic diversification to meet the needs of the budding technological economy, specifically in the realm of “computer-driven, relatively clean boutique mills to stamp out parts for the auto industry.” Calhoun County, *The Star* argued, was in a prime location to engage in this industry as it sat directly on Interstate 20 and was in close proximity to auto markets in Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee. “We are used to taking small steps, making small gains,” the editorial implored. “That has to stop. Big deals with international partners in new-tech renewal of old economies flow from developmental imagination...the new generation...rouses this community of communities to big thoughts about beckoning economic opportunities of our future.”²³²

After McClellan’s closure, many local media outlets portrayed the soon-to-be-shuttered Fort not as an economic cancer, as many had seen it for years, but as an opportunity. In *The Star*, James H. Hall, an active member of the local community, called on Annistonians to capitalize on the possibility to build a “biracial coalition” to help revitalize Anniston. He argued that the same effort used to try to retain the Fort should be used to attract major corporations like General Motors, Ford, IBM, and Westinghouse.²³³ The paper’s editorial board called for a general financial restructuring plan that prioritized economic diversification and “labor, public education,

²³¹ *Anniston Star* editorial, SG24010, Box 6, Folder 43 “Ft. McClellan Editorials” 1995, Alabama Governor Collection, Press Office Division, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama, United States.

²³² *Anniston Star* editorial, SG24010, Box 6, Folder 43 “Ft. McClellan Editorials” 1995, Alabama Governor Collection, Press Office Division, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama, United States.

²³³ “Hanging out the ‘closed’ sign at Ft. McClellan,” *The Anniston Star*, June 29, 1995

junior college, trade school and university programs that could teach more people to work in positions that would pay a meaningful wage.” Times were changing, *The Star* argued, and the closure of McClellan had given the region a prime opportunity to align itself with the economy of the future. Thousands of acres of land and empty training facilities and buildings sat open, ready for use. “Fort McClellan is promise land. Redevelopment when the Regular Army leaves will solve civilian problems troubling us for years,” *The Star* wrote.²³⁴

The departure of the Army would not solve civilian problems, however, but would rather create new ones, unforeseen by citizens of the struggling region. While *The Star* sold images of a future McClellan beaming with possibility, the reality on the inside was a more dismal picture. Possibly even more contentious than the politics of base closure were issues of base redevelopment that plagued shuttered military towns in the years that followed the BRAC era. The rampant closure of domestic military installations in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries represented “one of largest transfer of federal infrastructure, buildings, and land to municipalities in recent U.S. history.”²³⁵ Each of these base closures across the United States triggered years—and even decades—long processes of conversion, planning, and construction, which involved a host of players invested in sharing the outputs of redevelopment.

Before 1993, military base redevelopment was a convoluted bureaucratic process which left military communities largely in the dark about possibilities for land redevelopment. While President John F. Kennedy created the Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) in 1961 to aid areas suffering from military base closure, the Office sat largely dormant in the years prior to BRAC. With the large uptick in base closures in the 1990s, the Clinton administration found a need to revitalize the base redevelopment process to aid former military communities. With the

²³⁴ “Promising McClellan Potential,” *The Anniston Star*, September 8, 1995.

²³⁵ Touchton and Ashley, *Salvaging Community*, 2.

1994 Base Closure Communities Assistance Act (CAA), the OEA became responsible for overseeing the transfer of military assets to local municipalities. The legislation also streamlined the environmental evaluation process on former base, equipped communities with transition coordinators from the federal government, integrated other federal agencies into the base conversion process (the Office of Economic Adjustment, the Department of Labor, the Economic Development Administration, and the Federal Aviation Administration), and gave the DOD the ability to authorize temporary uses on former bases to stimulate short-term economic benefits while communities awaited permanent land transfers.²³⁶ The Clinton administration also implemented no-cost conveyances beginning in 1994, allowing communities to take possession of former military sites for no fee.²³⁷ The Pentagon and the Clinton administration aimed to yield their power to aid struggling communities through redevelopment in hopes of capitalizing on land transfers to effectively orient them towards new economies. After McClellan's closure the OEA would allocate \$1.7 million for the Fort McClellan area to implement a sweeping community redevelopment plan.²³⁸

The reality of the redevelopment process—for Anniston and many communities across the country sharing in its plight—would be far from as seamless as the streamlined process outlined by the Clinton administration. Chip Howell remembers the years in between BRAC's vote to close McClellan and its official closure in 1999 as a “slow bleed.”²³⁹ On January 18, 2000, Anniston's Joint Powers Authority signed a master lease with the United States Army, taking possession of 2,000 of McClellan's 10,000 acres of land and 800 buildings on the Fort.²⁴⁰ The

²³⁶ Touchton and Ashley, *Salvaging Community*, 29-31.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

²³⁸ United States General Accounting Office, “Military Bases: Status of Prior Base Realignment and Closure Rounds,” Washington, D.C., 1998. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/160/156428.pdf>

²³⁹ Chip Howell, interview by Denali Sagner, July 2, 2021, Anniston, Alabama.

²⁴⁰ “Fort redevelopment tops 2000 news coverage,” *The Anniston Star*, December 31, 2000, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106605242/>

months and years after the signing of the lease would not be marked by the “big thoughts” and “beckoning economic opportunities” *The Star* promised Annistonians, but rather by chaos and bureaucratic failures.²⁴¹ In November of 2000, the Joint Powers Authority sold the Buckner Circle headquarters area of the Fort to a private development group for \$2.4 million—far below the fair-market value—due to a lack of proper prior appraisals.²⁴² The Fort, redevelopers would come to realize, was riddled with chemical contamination and unexploded ordinance, making it essentially inoperative. Moreover, the Army had left murky indications of where toxic weaponry was used. “Cleanup was designating an acre at a time, calculating what we thought may be in there with testing—with ground penetrating radars—and seeing what may be there. [It involved] taking some tests, and then pricing it out that way. Instead of having a huge bid or cleaning a hundred acres, we're only bidding out an acre at a time [to limit] our risk and our liability,” Howell explained. “We had thousands of acres, but we did not have probably more than ten or fifteen that we could put together. You can't attract economic development that way.”²⁴³

After September 11, 2001, parts of McClellan were repopulated with the Alabama National Guard and the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Center for Domestic Preparedness to prepare for the budding War on Terror. Yet, Howell qualifies, “We had pieces that were great, that were able to function and continue to serve the nation. But those were blocks of property that included the best buildings, low hanging fruit.”²⁴⁴ The rest of the base, an uncharted forest of unexploded bombs, chemical-polluted groundwater, and decaying buildings, would prove a much more difficult sell. The pattern of redeveloping McClellan would continue

²⁴¹ *Anniston Star* editorial, SG24010, Box 6, Folder 43 “Ft. McClellan Editorials” 1995, Alabama Governor Collection, Press Office Division, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama, United States.

²⁴² Matthew Korade, “JPA Plans Appraisals of Fort Properties,” *The Anniston Star*, November 17, 2000, p. 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/106548574>

²⁴³ Chip Howell, interview by Denali Sagner, July 2, 2021, Anniston, Alabama.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

on as such throughout the early 2000s, as local boosters attempted to sell the limited parcels of the Fort that were safe for reuse. Yet, increasing deindustrialization proved difficult as Annistonians hoped to grow their economy in traditional, shrinking industrial realms. This uncertainty marked the turn of the twenty-first century in Northeast Alabama, a legacy of which is visible in economic development, civic life, and local politics through the present day.

Conclusion

Towards the end of our conversation, Chip Howell tells me a story. A few years ago, a friend of Howell's sat down on a British Airways flight from Nairobi, Kenya to New York City. As he settled in for the long flight, a trivia question popped up on the television in front of him.

The question: *What is the most contaminated spot in the world?*

The answer: *Anniston, Alabama.*

Before I proceed, it is important to note that this statement is likely not true. In 2013, international not-for-profits Pure Earth and Green Cross International published a list of the world's most contaminated places. This list included sites like Nigeria's Niger River Delta, Argentina's Río Matanza, and Kalimantan, Indonesia. Anniston, Alabama was not on the list.²⁴⁵ As of August 2021, Anniston did not even make the list of most polluted cities in the United States.²⁴⁶

It is possible that the international jetliner's trivia game was incorrect. Maybe Howell, or his friend, remembered this anecdote incorrectly. Maybe, this never happened at all.

Despite its inaccuracy, however, the story is a poignant reminder of the uniquely terrible, yet universally global nature of Anniston's history: one of exploitation and devastation at the hands of America's dual gods—capitalism and national defense. It is a living example of the lore of Anniston, the industries that ruled it, and the people that lived—and died—in its factories, neighborhoods, Army bunkers, and oncology wards. While the world moves onto new frontiers of American industry, artificial intelligence, global war, and climate change, Annistonians

²⁴⁵ "The World's 10 Most Polluted Places," Scientific American (Scientific American, 2013), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/slideshow/10-most-polluted-places-in-the-world/#:~:text=DZERZHINSK%2C%20RUSSIA%3A%20This%20city%20of,%2Dera%20chemical%20manufacturing>.

²⁴⁶ Olivia Lai, "15 Most Polluted Cities in the US," Earth.Org, August 11, 2021, <https://earth.org/most-polluted-cities-in-the-us/>.

remain here. For the citizens of Calhoun County, Anniston will always be the world's most contaminated place—not just contaminated by chemical pollution, but by disinvestment, poverty, and the fatal outputs of austerity and political strife.

This study has sought to situate Anniston's present in its deep-rooted past—one marked by initial successes at the hands of the military-industrial economy, followed by disinvestment and decline as older industrial sectors and personnel-heavy forms of warfare gave way to high-tech militarization, an economic model in which Anniston could not compete. Anniston's foundations as a town built by industrial powerbrokers established systems of economic and social order which prioritized industry, resented racial equality, and exploited labor for the gain of capital. The city's ceaseless pattern of chasing funding for its military base trapped it in an unstable cycle which depended on military dollars for critical investments in town. These investments only came, of course, in times of global war. As other rural areas chased new forms of development which followed in trends of automation, computerization, and technological warfare, Anniston remained tethered to the familiar. Fort McClellan's closure would ultimately mark the most salient example of the unsustainability of this strategy.

Anniston today gets by. McClellan, the name for the expanse of land which was once the Fort, is now home to a handful of corporations, government agencies, and private residential developments. Land redevelopment firm Matrix Design Group, general and mechanical contractor Arris, Inc., manufacturer of interior automotive parts International Automotive Components Group, and consulting firm Whorton Engineering are among McClellan's major players. Other parcels of land have been sold to Jacksonville State University (the region's leading educational institution), the Center for Domestic Preparedness, and the McClellan Assisted Living Facility. Some of the job losses incurred by deindustrialization and Fort

McClellan's closure have been remedied with the establishment of new businesses. In October 2012, the Alabama Industrial Access Bridge and Road Corporation awarded the McClellan Development Authority one million dollars to improve roads on the former base, amounting to 130 new jobs.²⁴⁷ International Automotive Components' expansion into McClellan brought 75 new jobs in 2014, in addition to service positions needed to support McClellan's new corporate and government offices.²⁴⁸ Anniston's unemployment rate remains low, at 3.4 percent, far below the national rate of six percent.²⁴⁹ Calhoun County's towns have grown increasingly cooperative in the face of sweeping economic changes. Because of this, Chip Howell remains optimistic.

Yet in many other ways, Anniston remains shackled to the fatal outputs of paternalistic industrialism and racial capitalism. Since 2010, Calhoun County has lost 5.28 percent of its population.²⁵⁰ The area has been unable to attract major technological developments—neither civilian nor military—as other areas in the South have. Job growth in the Anniston metropolitan area remains low, at 0.2 percent per year.²⁵¹ Calhoun County's largest employers are some of the few relics of its industrial past which have weathered the storm of American economic advancement. Honda Manufacturing currently employs 4,200 workers, waterworks foundry Tyler Union employs 485, FabArc Steel employs 305, and heavy-duty transit bus manufacturer New Flyer employs 750.²⁵² The Anniston Army Depot—an enduring artifact of the U.S. Army's

²⁴⁷ Laura Camper, "Paving the Way to Jobs: McClellan road improvements to support industry," *The Anniston Star*, October 11, 2012, p. 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/107888947>

²⁴⁸ Patrick McCreless, "'Exciting Expansion,'" *The Anniston Star*, December 10, 2014, p. 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/127401442>

²⁴⁹ "Economy at a Glance: Anniston-Oxford, AL," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 16, 2021), https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.al_anniston_msa.htm#eag_al_anniston_msa.f.2. "The Employment Situation — November 2021," *The Employment Situation* — November 2021 §, pp. 1-41, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empisit.pdf>.

²⁵⁰ "Calhoun County, Alabama Population 2021," *World Population Review*, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-counties/al/calhoun-county-population>.

²⁵¹ "Best Small Places for Business and Careers 2019: Anniston, AL," *Forbes* (Forbes Magazine, 2019), <https://www.forbes.com/places/al/anniston/?sh=15da8702a092>.

²⁵² "Existing Industries," Calhoun County Economic Development Council, accessed December 16, 2021, <http://www.calhouncountyedc.org/industrial-info/existing-industries/>.

presence in town—still stands as a maintenance and repair facility for various Army vehicles and weapons.²⁵³ It currently employs 4,300 workers.²⁵⁴ Even still, Northeast Alabama’s manufacturing center is far from safe, as deindustrialization and offshoring continue to ravage the domestic industrial sector.²⁵⁵

The segregation and disenfranchisement of the region’s Black population—which can be traced back to economic and spatial decisions dictated by Woodstock Iron—is strikingly visible today. Black communities, constructed near toxic manufacturing plants in the town’s early history, would become the principal victims of PCB dumping years later. In the early 2000s, Anniston’s Black areas became known as “cancer clusters,” as residents contended with years of nerve and brain damage, cancer, and liver diseases due to chemical exposure.²⁵⁶ “White flight” due to evaporating capital has left the city to contend with residential and educational segregation in its public schools—while Anniston is 52 percent Black, Black students are 97 percent of Anniston High School’s student body.²⁵⁷ In 2019, 12.26 percent of Anniston’s white residents fell below the poverty line, compared with 36.93 percent of its Black residents.²⁵⁸ Despite federal, state, and local anti-poverty efforts, historical patterns of structural racism and poverty prevail.

Studying Anniston’s historical development underlines important questions about the relationship between American industry, the military state, and the everyday citizen. What did a

²⁵³ “Mission,” Anniston Army Depot, October 4, 2016, <https://www.anad.army.mil/missionANAD.shtml>.

²⁵⁴ “Existing Industries,” Calhoun County Economic Development Council.

²⁵⁵ Noam Scheiber, “The Biden Team Wants to Transform the Economy. Really,” *The New York Times Magazine* (The New York Times, February 11, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/11/magazine/biden-economy.html>.

²⁵⁶ Washington, “Monsanto Poisoned This Alabama Town - And People Are Still Sick.”

²⁵⁷ Editorial Board of The Anniston Star, “Editorial: A City and Its School,” *The Anniston Star*, July 26, 2018, https://www.annistonstar.com/opinion/editorials/editorial-a-city-and-its-school/article_5805ef38-9127-11e8-8aee-cf53a0897e35.html.

²⁵⁸ “Anniston, Alabama Population 2021.” *World Population Review*. Accessed December 16, 2021. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/anniston-al-population>.

municipality like Anniston gain—and lose—from supplanting the state-sponsored New Deal with military development and private-sector capitalism? How do the historical legacies of the New Deal, the military-industrial complex, and the Cold War continue to dictate patterns of American political and economic life? Why did some regions of the United States thrive with the ascendance of the technology-heavy military, while others were crushed under its weight? And, most importantly, as the American industrial sector continues to shrink and artificial intelligence and computer power continue to grow, what will happen to Northeast Alabama? In ten years' time, will Noble Street's storefronts be dotted with even more "For Sale" signs?

The Anniston area lives enduringly in the shadow of what once was—a bustling commercial center, a regional landmark, the “cast-iron soil pipe capital of the world,” and a bastion of American military might.²⁵⁹ Its overgrown military base and sleepy business district once rang with the echoes of Army shooting practice and the humming of iron production. Today, they have been supplanted by a suffocating quiet. Getting back on I-20 and heading east towards Atlanta, Anniston's downtown fades into deep green forest as quickly as it emerged. A city that was once the future, recedes again into the past.

²⁵⁹ Mike Sherman, “Plastics potential threat to iron soil pipe industry,” *The Anniston Star*, June 10, 1971, p. 3D, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/115166038/>.

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