

THE FORT DIX SIX: 'NEW FORM OF TERRORISM' -THE TARGETS

New scrutiny of security on bases

BY JOIE TYRRELL

joie.tyrrell@newsday.com; Staff Writer Luis Perez contributed to

May 9, 2007

Military bases make attractive targets for terrorists, and experts said that the plot uncovered yesterday to attack Fort Dix is likely to lead to a reassessment of security at installations such as Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn.

"In light of this, bases will be put on particularly high alert. One of the things that [the arrests] does is focus and reinforce the need for ongoing high security, which the bases have," said Vincent Henry, director of the Homeland Security Management Institute at Long Island University at Riverhead.

Fort Dix was the would-be target of six men who were arrested and accused yesterday of plotting to attack the New Jersey Army base and massacre scores of U.S. soldiers. Soldiers at Fort Dix could have successfully defended the base, but there probably would have been casualties, said Rep. Peter King (R-Seaford), the ranking member of the House Homeland Security Committee.

"This is going to cause everyone to re-look to see whether or not the military bases are in fact able to withstand these acts. I am confident they are," King said.

But a 2006 report from the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, found weaknesses in security at U.S. military installations. The report found that the Army's employment screening process had resulted in the hiring of unscreened security guards, some with criminal histories. The Department of Defense had turned to hiring private contractors for security after Sept. 11 when numerous U.S.-based personnel were sent to Afghanistan and Iraq.

Rob Timmins, field director of the Manhattan-based Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of

America, said that the incident in Fort Dix highlights lax security there and at other military bases round the country.

"There needs to be a re-evaluation," said Timmins. "Protecting the force at home, you really can't leave it up to rent-a-cops."

Still, P.J. Crowley, senior fellow and director of National Defense and Homeland Security at the Center for American Progress in Washington, D.C., said U.S. military bases are among the most secure installations in the country.

Crowley, a retired Air Force colonel, said, "If you look at what we are spending today on critical infrastructure protection - two-thirds of it is spent defending military installations."

Still, the plot to attack Fort Dix has led others to question security at federal entities closer to home. Fort Hamilton, for example, is a military installation that contains a recruitment center, police and engineering units.

Rep. Tim Bishop (D-Southampton) said it further highlights vulnerabilities in secure areas beyond military bases, such as Plum Island Animal Disease Center, where highly contagious livestock diseases are studied on an isolated island off eastern Suffolk County.

"At the present time Plum Island is an under-protected facility," Bishop said.

Christopher Kelly, a spokesman for the Homeland Security department, said security is the top priority at Plum Island.

At the Brookhaven National Laboratory, access is restricted to employees and approved guests and the lab maintains a highly trained and armed protective force, according to lab officials.

Staff Writer Luis Perez contributed to this story.

Echo of plot twist on 'Sopranos'

Ironically, in this past Sunday's episode of "The Sopranos," mobster Tony Soprano went to FBI Agents Harris and Goddard with the names of two Arab men who used to hang around his club, the Bada Bing. In an earlier episode, Tony had spied them on the street and seemed suspicious about their activities.

"Can I bank the result in good will?" Tony asked the agents, looking to get a possible

break in the future. But all Agent Harris could promise was a letter to Tony's file - should he ever get convicted, it would be considered at sentencing.

Copyright 2007 Newsday Inc.