



## CITY OF FORT BRAGG

*Incorporated August 5, 1889*

416 N. Franklin St.

Fort Bragg, CA 95437

Phone: (707) 961-2823

Fax: (707) 961-2802

<http://city.fortbragg.com>

July 27, 2015

California Legislative Black Caucus  
c/o Vice Chair Isadore Hall, III  
State Capitol, Room 4085  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**SUBJECT: Request that Fort Bragg be Renamed**

Honorable Chair Jones-Sawyer, Sr. and members of the California Legislative Black Caucus:

The Fort Bragg City Council received your letter dated July 16, 2015 requesting that the City Council and residents of Fort Bragg rename our city. Your letter cites a "need for discussion about the inappropriateness of any public entity promoting individuals that committed treason against our nation during the Civil War and fought to defend the defenseless cause of slavery."

Our community has had quite a bit of dialogue in recent weeks about its name and its namesake, Braxton Bragg. Fort Bragg blogger Kate Erickson sums up our sentiments quite well:

"California State Senator Steve Glazer claims the name of our town pays tribute to the Confederacy and has introduced SB 539 to persuade us to change it. This is absurd. Braxton Bragg was an inept Confederate and holds the distinction of being one of the most hated military men of all time. Our town's name does not honor him. Over the last century and a half, the name Fort Bragg honors the generations of people who have lived, worked and died here. It belongs to us and we aim to keep it." *(full article attached)*

We invite you to visit Fort Bragg and enjoy the hospitality only a small town on the north coast of California can offer.

Sincerely,

Dave Turner  
Mayor

Lindy Peters  
Vice Mayor

Michael Cimolino  
Councilmember

Scott Deitz  
Councilmember

Doug Hammerstrom  
Councilmember

cc: Senator Steve Glazer, Senator Mike McGuire

# From the life of Braxton Bragg

By Kate Erickson

Recent talk about changing the name of Fort Bragg, California, made me curious about my town's namesake. For years, I'd assumed that Confederate General Braxton Bragg had a hand in setting up the fort. But that's not true - he never stepped foot in Northern California.

Furthermore, the place was given its name four years before Bragg served in the Confederate Army. In the summer of 1857, First Lieutenant Horatio Gibson was dispatched to the California hinterlands to build a military post near the Noyo River. Ten years earlier, Braxton Bragg had been his commanding officer in the Mexican War. Horatio was one of the few soldiers who claimed to admire him.

I'd like to offer an opposing theory for how our town got the name. Before global warming, the weather was not kind to the Mendocino Coast. For decades, residents had to choose which weather pattern—fog, rain or wind—they hated the least.

I imagine Horatio and his crew struggling to build shelters with subpar tools. When the winter rains began, someone probably said, "Hey, why don't we name this Godforsaken place after that nut ball Braxton Bragg?"

Despite growing up in a poor family, Bragg attended West Point and finished fifth in a class of 50 cadets. In 1856, after nearly 20 years of military service, he retired to farm his

Louisiana sugar plantation. Shortly before retirement, he was given two crappy assignments—Fort Gibson in Oklahoma Indian territory and Fort Washita near the Texas border. This may have been the Army's way of "encouraging" him to retire.

In his early years, Braxton proved to be a brave soldier, saving the life of future Confederate President Jefferson Davis in the Mexican War. Over time, his behavior became increasingly kooky.



An illustration of Braxton Bragg, from "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War," pub. 1888.

Ulysses S. Grant wrote that Bragg had an obsessive need for proper procedure that bordered on mental illness. At one time, Bragg had been both a company commander and quartermaster (the officer in charge of approving the disbursement of provisions).

As company commander, Bragg made a request to the company quartermaster — himself—for something he wanted.

As quartermaster, he wrote an official reason for denying it.

As company commander, he argued that he was entitled to it.

As quartermaster, he continued to persist in denying himself what he needed.

Bragg finally requested the intervention of the post commander who said, "My God, Mr. Bragg, you have quarreled with every officer in the army, and now you are quarreling with yourself."

Initially, Bragg opposed the idea of secession. However, when civil war became imminent he emerged from retirement and returned to the military in 1861. His years away had not improved his mental state. His men were often mystified by his orders on the battlefield. He would

command reckless, aggressive offensive attacks or become bizarrely hesitant to move forward, sometimes in the same battle.

After a victory at Chickamauga, Bragg passed up a chance to thrash Union forces by letting them retreat to Chattanooga, Tennessee. After this debacle, Confederate Cavalry General Nathan Forrest said to him: "You have played the part of a damned scoundrel, and are a coward, and if you were any part of a man I would slap your jaws and force you to resign it."

"You may as well not issue any orders to me, for I will not obey them. I say to you that if you ever again try to interfere with me or cross my path it will be at the peril of your life." Bragg's subordinates threatened mutiny and called upon President Davis to remove him.

But Davis stood by the man who had once saved his life and, instead, transferred the generals under Bragg's command.

After the Civil War, Bragg returned to Louisiana to find that the Union Army had seized his plantation. He eventually found work as the superintendent of the New Orleans Waterworks and then as chief engineer of Alabama.

He moved to Texas in 1874 to become the chief engineer of the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad and later served as the chief railroad inspector for the state.

Bragg died in Galveston, Texas, on August 27, 1876 while walking down the street with a friend.

Given Braxton's history, it's hard to imagine any place named after him, let alone four. In addition to our little town, the Army post in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and a ghost town in Hardin County Texas share his name. There's also a company in Knoxville, Tennessee, called Braxton-Bragg, which specializes in "Tools for Granite, Marble, Tile, Polished Concrete & Stone Restoration."

California State Senator Steve Glazer claims the name of our town pays tribute to the Confederacy and has introduced SB 539 to persuade us to change it. This is absurd. Braxton Bragg was an inept Confederate and holds the distinction of being one of the most hated military men of all time. Our town's name does not honor him. Over the last century and a half, the name Fort Bragg honors the generations of people who lived, worked and died here. It belongs to us and we aim to keep it.

*Editor's Note: This week, eight members of the California Assembly Black Caucus sent a letter to the City of Fort Bragg asking the town to change its name as part of a nationwide movement to remove public symbols of Confederate figures. An earlier effort, state Senate Bill 538 by Steve Glazer of Orinda, has been rewritten to not include cities. The caucus' letter urged Fort Bragg officials to consider the changing the town's name anyway. The following is an account of Braxton Bragg's connections, both to the military outpost of Fort Bragg, after which the town was named, and his record during the Civil War.*