

CREATIVE CONCRETE CONSTRUCTION

A New Face for Fort Benning

Freestanding precast concrete façades and huge columns provide new gateway

by George Spence,
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Left: To dress up the gateway to Fort Benning, Ga., designers created freestanding precast concrete façades that hide the existing steel bridge and added a precast concrete column pedestal at each corner topped with a bronze statue.

Below: The precast concrete façades at Fort Benning, Ga., were funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) through the Georgia Department of Transportation and private funds from the Gateway Foundation of Columbus.

Officials at Fort Benning in Columbus, Ga., wanted to project a more dramatic face for visitors to the fort, one of the Army's busiest. To achieve that, designers created freestanding precast concrete façades that hide the existing steel bridge and added round precast concrete column pedestals at each corner, topped with an imposing statue.

The key challenge for precaster Metromont Corp. in Hiram, Ga., was to combine the highly finished aesthetic design with a structural concept that would allow the sculptural elements—essentially narrow bridge beams in their own right—to provide an integrated solution.

The \$6.8-million design features column piers on each end with a supporting pier in the highway median. The façades on each side of the bridge were created as two prestressed panels, each approximately 89 ft long and weighing 100,000 lb. The panels bear on new foundations and have metal lettering attached to them to spell "Fort Benning Georgia" on the north façade and "Columbus, Georgia" on the south façade.

The structures' finish consists of a white/buff mix of aggregates with a moderate sandblast. A total of 238 pieces, comprising 30,439 ft² of architectural precast concrete were erected using a crane positioned on each side of the interstate. Traffic only needed to be stopped for the short time when a panel was being set over the highway.

The erector also placed the four piers, which each support four tall, round precast columns topped with a precast concrete column cap—a total of 50 ft tall. Bronze statues were placed atop



the pillars by the precast erector. Two feature American bald eagles, while the others showcase statues representing the Armor and Infantry schools that train at the post.

"It's magnificent," said Maj. Gen. Robert Brown, commander of Fort Benning and the Maneuver Center of Excellence. Others agree: The project, completed in October 2011, was awarded first place in the design awards competition of the Georgia Chapter of the American Concrete Institute.

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Statues atop the column pedestals reflect the units that train at the post.

