

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY **BIRD**

August 25, 2005

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Department of Defense Releases

BRAC Panel Begins Final Deliberations

American Forces Press Service

Donna Miles

August 24, 2005

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission generally supported the Defense Department's recommendations today as the panel began its final four days of deliberations. However, commission members voted down proposals to close a submarine base, a shipyard and an Army depot.

The panel met in Arlington, Va., to begin voting on DoD's proposal to reshape the military infrastructure and eliminate excess by closing 33 major bases and realigning 29 others. Officials emphasized that the votes are not considered

final until the commission finishes its deliberations on Aug. 27.

While supporting most of the proposals today, the commission voted against those to close Submarine Base New London, Conn., and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Maine, and agreed to realign rather than close Red River Army Depot, Texas.

Commission members supported the proposed closure of Fort Monmouth, N.J., but only with the stipulation that there's no degradation in programs and initiatives or interruption of operations that support warfighters in Iraq and Afghanistan.

They rejected a proposal to relocate the Night Vision Lab from Fort Belvoir, Va., to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., where most of Fort Monmouth's assets are slated to move under the plan.

The panel also approved the closure of four other major Army installations: Fort Gillem and Fort McPherson, in Georgia; Fort Monroe, Va.; and the U.S. Army Garrison in Selfridge, Mich.

The commission also agreed to close almost 400 Army Reserve and Army National Guard facilities and to create joint centers in their place.

Turning to Navy matters, the commission approved recommendations to close Naval Station Pascagoula, Miss.; Naval Air Station Atlanta, Ga.; and Naval Station Ingleside and Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, both in Texas.

The body also voted not to close Naval Air Station Oceana, Va., as the East Coast's Master Jet Base, but only with strict provisions that local and state officials take active steps to stop growth around the base within the next six months.

Commissioners had added Oceana to DoD's recommended closure list in July, citing concerns over residential encroachment around the base they said presents a safety risk to both air crews and residents. They agreed to go

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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forward with the plan to move the master jet base to Cecil Field, Fla., if Virginia officials do not heed their warning.

The commission tabled a vote on Willow Grove Naval Air Station, Pa., until Aug. 27.

After its final vote this weekend, the panel will send its final report to President Bush by Sept. 8. The president, if he concurs, will send the final list to Congress, which can accept or reject it in its entirety, but not change it.

Today's session follows months of hearings around the country regarding DoD's plan that defense officials say will save some \$49 billion over the next 20 years.

Some BRAC commissioners have challenged the department's projected cost savings, as well as the military justification for some recommendations. The panel voted July 19 to add several military installations to a list being considered for closure during hearings in Washington. DoD had recommended one of those bases, Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine, for realignment, but not closure.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld defended DoD's BRAC recommendations during an Aug. 23 Pentagon news briefing and urged commissioners against going too far in changing them.

"I feel that we made very solid recommendations," the secretary said. "I suspect the commission, when all is said and done, will endorse the overwhelming majority of these recommendations."

Rumsfeld called the plan an opportunity to "reset our force," to make it more efficient and cost-effective. The recommendations "didn't come out of mid-air," he said, but followed two and a half years of study and review that were free of political motivations. "There wasn't an ounce of politics in any aspect of it," he said.

BRAC: McClellan Loses 'Fort,' Gains 18,000-acre Community

American Forces Press Service

Samantha L. Quigley
August 24, 2005

In 1995, the Army's Fort McClellan here was a bustling military installation that provided numerous civilian jobs and business for the surrounding community.

Today the former post, closed in May 1999 by 1995 Base Realignment and Closure actions, is an 18,000-acre master-planned community.

When Fort McClellan was named in BRAC 1995, residents here feared the worst -- that Anniston, right outside the base, would cease to exist. But thanks to proper handling, BRAC proved to be a blessing in disguise.

Before closing, the fort was home to the Army's Chemical and Military Police schools, a training brigade, and the Defense Department's Polygraph Institute. The Army schools and training brigade relocated to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., and has since integrated with the Engineer School there to form the U.S. Army Maneuver Support Center. The Polygraph Institute relocated to Fort Jackson, S.C.

According to Robert Downing, Calhoun County commissioner and a founder of the McClellan Joint Powers Authority that's in charge of redeveloping the former fort, the area is thriving. Now McClellan, the formal name the new community took, now hosts a little of everything. It includes residential areas, a private school, industrial businesses, a thoroughfare that will ease travel in the area, and even a wildlife refuge.

And officials claim a healthy-sized workforce employed by new tenants on the former fort property. "There are more people, more civilians, working at (what was) Fort McClellan now than there were when it was a military base," Downing said.

The area has economically rebounded too, according to Sherri Sumners, Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce president.

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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Sales tax revenue did fall when the residents of Fort McClellan moved out and the installation officially closed. But that has turned around, she said. "Anniston (was) hardest hit, of course," Summers said, but added that those sales-tax revenues are above "pre-shut down levels."

She said Lenlock, another Anniston community just outside of the former base's main entrance, was hit hard. "The smaller (the businesses) were, the harder they were hit. But if you go out there now, you'll see that the store fronts are filled again."

Kee's Tailor Shop, a Lenlock dry cleaners, can attest to that. In its pre-closure life, the family-owned business catered to a military clientele. Now about 40 uniforms from guardsmen and reservists still at the former base come in daily, said Duane Lewis, whose family bought the shop in 2000.

"We knew the (previous) owners, and they did probably double that," Lewis said. "They could get up to 100 a day, (and) 80 was a regular day. Another businessman, H. Brandt Ayers, chairman and publisher of Consolidated Publishing Co., the first new facility on the former base property, remembered the dip in the community's morale at the announcement of the closure.

"There was a slump, both psychologically and economically," he said. "We felt it. We lost at least 300 subscriptions (to The Anniston Star newspaper) permanently."

But local leaders quickly realized that Anniston had just been granted an "extraordinary asset," as Ayers described it.

City officials found ways financially to support the new, expansive community with basic services, and have made other strides.

For example, McClellan became the Alabama Symphony's summer home, a move to further develop an arts community. In fact, the musical group set up shop in the historic warehouse area that formerly housed the Army's horse stables.

"If you establish a strong arts and culture community there in that center historic area, then everything else around it becomes a higher use," Downing said. "You're going to attract more businesses ... of a higher nature because you have a very strong arts identity."

McClellan has also proven itself to be a desirable address for residents as well. Existing military housing, both officers and enlisted quarters, has been renovated and offered for sale or rent.

Eastern Parkway will eventually connect U.S. 20 from Anniston's southern neighbor, Oxford, with the northern end of the city. The parkway will run through the center of McClellan and will ease traffic through both cities.

And if Ayers sees his dream come to fruition, McClellan will one day be part of a research triangle similar to the one that exists in North Carolina around Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill.

"With all of this (existing) infrastructure, with all of this acreage (and) here we are on I-20, right in the middle between two clusters of research universities, it strikes me as a good possibility that we could turn this into a first-class research center," Ayers said, citing research opportunities in the automotive, defense and homeland-security industries.

To the east is Auburn (Ala.) University; to the west is the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, each about two hours away from Anniston. There's also Jacksonville State University, about 10 minutes away.

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, which distributes funds provided by Congress and state legislature, has requested a proposal for the research triangle. The impact of such a venture would be significant, he said.

"It's jobs," Ayers said. "It has a definite economic meaning to both northeast Alabama and northwest Georgia. "But further than that, if it does develop, it brings in a cadre of people

who think in a different framework. There's a social payday that changes the character of the whole leadership cadre of a community; that lifts it up."

Downing said though, that the road to this point hasn't necessarily been an easy one. Simply trying to figure out what government should be able to annex the land and who should have jurisdiction was a struggle.

There was anxiety about Anniston even annexing the property. Calhoun County, however, has no home-rule authority, so it couldn't even pass laws that would raise revenue to support the new community. It was clear another answer was needed.

The county commission's creation, the Joint Powers Authority, was the answer, Downing said. The JPA oversees how the property is sold or donated. The city of Anniston has zoning authority, and has annexed the fort's property. Getting to that juncture caused some tensions among local governments. "It was painful, in a sense, to go through the political divisiveness that surrounded the jurisdiction issue," he said. "You come out of those things stronger and everyone realizes ... you only have one opportunity to redevelop this fort and we want to do something that ... will be lasting for future generations."

The JPA hired a planner to help them create a forward-looking and -thinking plan, Downing said. He also offered a measure of learned wisdom for those who may face the same circumstances that Anniston has faced and overcome.

"Be inclusive. Be broad based and have thick skin," Downing offered. "And always bear in mind that what you're doing has greater impact on future generations than it does on us. So you have a very keen responsibility I think in that regard."

Summers agreed, pointing out that patience is key to a successful redevelopment. "Don't be so eager to re-use that you don't really look at the full potential of what you have," she said. "It's

better to invest a little time in planning to determine what's going to be a good fit and what isn't."

And just because a military installation closes doesn't mean a complete severing of ties to its former host community.

The Center for Domestic Preparedness has called McClellan home since June 1998. The CDP is the only all-hazards training center in the country: It offers first responders training on chemical, ordnance, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

Originally under the control of the Department of Justice, the center officially became part of the Department of Homeland Security in 2003. The CDP is the DHS' only federally chartered WMD training center.

National News Articles

Commission Votes to Close Bases Nationwide

Panel Opts Close Ft. Monroe, Maintain Oceana Naval Station

Washington Post
August 24, 2005

A federal panel voted today to keep open the Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach, close historic Fort Monroe in Virginia and move more than 2,000 jobs to the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland from New Jersey as part of the Pentagon's restructuring of hundreds of U.S. military bases and facilities across the country.

The nine-member Base Closure and Realignment Commission also voted to shut Army bases in Georgia and Michigan and to close nearly 400 Army Reserve and National Guard facilities in dozens of states.

Southeast Virginia took a hit with the closing of Fort Monroe and the panel's decision to spare a Navy submarine base in New London, Conn., and a shipyard in Kittery, Maine. Those closings would have benefited the Tidewater region, with

Norfolk Naval Station gaining 4,000 personnel and the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, 2,000.

But 15,000 jobs in the area were saved with the decision to keep open the Oceana Naval Air Station. The commission, however, voted to keep the facility open with the caveat that state and local officials take steps to reduce encroaching development on the base. The development had raised concerns that pilots in training couldn't take off and land like they would off aircraft carriers.

If those steps are not taken, the "master jet base" at Oceana will be moved back to Cecil Field in Florida, where it was before moving to Virginia Beach in 1999. The air station is Virginia Beach's largest employer.

Virginia state officials quickly announced they will introduce legislation to allow the city of Virginia Beach to keep critical areas of the base free from development.

Still to be decided is the fate of Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Northwest Washington, which the Pentagon wants to close, and whether Arlington and Alexandria will lose almost 23,000 defense workers housed in leased office space.

The commission is reviewing a plan proposed by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld to close about 180 military installations nationwide. His plan will save \$49 billion over 20 years, he has said.

Once the commission has finished its review of the plan, it goes to President Bush for approval.

Most of the Army's proposals were quickly approved. The commission did overrule the Pentagon on two of its biggest requests, however, with the decision to keep open the Maine shipyard and the Connecticut submarine base. It also spared an army depot in Texas.

Seven of the nine commission members voted to close Fort Monmouth in New Jersey and move more than 2,000 of its jobs to Maryland. But at the same time, the members said Fort

Monmouth should not close if that would cause any disruption of the war on terror. That caveat meant it was not immediately clear when the New Jersey base would actually close.

Several members of New Jersey's congressional delegation had banded together with a citizens' coalition to try to save the Army research and development facility at Fort Monmouth, saying the work conducted there was vital to U.S. soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Pentagon officials argued that consolidating the work in Maryland made more sense than having it scattered in various states.

Maryland officials hailed the new jobs coming to Aberdeen, which is about 140 miles south of Fort Monmouth in the northeastern corner of Maryland.

Rep. C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-Md.) said the move was "not about New Jersey or about Maryland. It is about doing what is right, what is most efficient, and what will best protect the warfighter as we continue to fight the war on terror."

The commission voted unanimously to accept the Pentagon's recommendation to close Fort Monroe in Hampton, Va., which dates to the early 1800s. Fort Monroe, situated on a peninsula jutting into the Chesapeake Bay and surrounded by a moat, is the headquarters for the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, one of the Army's largest commands.

The base employs 4,175 people with an annual payroll of more than \$182 million. Among the employees are 2,700 civilians.

According to the deed of the fort, after it closes it will revert to the state. The Army has said the one-time cost to close the base is about \$72.4 million, but the net savings over 20 years would amount to \$686.6 million. Hampton Mayor Ross A. Kearney II has said that disposing of the fort would be expensive.

Confederate President Jefferson Davis was imprisoned in the fort during the Civil War.

President Lincoln visited the highly-secure fort during the height of that war.

Before voting started, the commission chairman, Anthony Principi, said reviewing the Pentagon's proposals presented the commission with "unprecedented challenges." He said the proposals included almost 900 separate actions affecting military installations, "more than double the combined total of actions considered by all prior BRAC commissions combined."

The Pentagon's proposals, the most ambitious ever, marked the first effort to reconfigure domestic military bases in a decade.

"We went to extraordinary lengths to ensure the soundness, correctness, and integrity of the base realignment and closure process and to fulfill our commitment to transparency, honesty, and fairness for all," Principi said.

He said, however, that the commission was well aware "that the decision we reach will have a profound impact on the communities hosting our military installations and, more importantly, on the people who bring those communities to life."

The commission also voted to close Fort Gillem and Fort McPherson in Georgia and the U.S. Army Garrison in Selfridge, Mich. The panel chose to restrict rather than close the Red River Army Depot in Texas, which repairs Humvees and Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

The Oceana Naval Air Station, which hosts F-14 Tomcats and F/A-18 Hornets and Super Hornets deployed aboard aircraft carriers, was added to the list by the commission.

The Navy has been talking for some time about its need for training space somewhere with more room than Oceana, which is 3,000 acres. Officials have said they would like 30,000 acres and have been trying to purchase property in North Carolina. But the Navy has been saying it would keep Oceana open for now and pair it with a training facility.

In the long term, the Pentagon has said it wants to replace Oceana with a new master base on the

East Coast --but not during the current round of base closings.

New England, Va. Bases Survive Cut Panel to Vote Today on Walter Reed

Washington Post

Bradley Graham and Eric M. Weiss

The federal base-closing commission rejected two of the Pentagon's most significant recommendations on the future of U.S. military installations yesterday, voting to keep open a sprawling submarine base in Connecticut and a historic shipyard in Maine.

Four other sizable military facilities, in Texas, California, Louisiana and Nevada, also were spared by the commission, which demonstrated a readiness to overrule the Defense Department during the first day of voting on the largest proposed closure and consolidation of domestic military bases in a decade.

But such deviations from the Pentagon's plan were largely the exception. For the most part, the nine-member commission went along with the department, backing the closure of 12 major Army bases and four major Navy installations and the shutting of hundreds of Navy Reserve, Army Reserve and National Guard facilities in dozens of states.

The commission also agreed with the Pentagon - - for now, at least -- to save Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach. But it threatened to reverse that decision and shift operations to Florida unless Virginia officials act quickly to reduce development encircling the massive jet base. That could mean buying up homes and relocating schools that lie in the flight path.

The commission plans to vote today on two proposals important to the Washington region: closing Walter Reed Army Medical Center and shifting 20,000 defense jobs in leased office space in Northern Virginia to bases farther from the Pentagon.

Moving swiftly through its deliberations yesterday without much debate, even on the most disputed cases, the commission also

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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appeared poised to tackle its most challenging issue -- an Air Force proposal to remove aircraft from about two dozen Air National Guard facilities -- as early as this afternoon, a day ahead of schedule.

The commission must submit its final report to President Bush by Sept. 8. The president can either accept the list or send it back for revision, before forwarding it to Congress, which must either accept or reject the recommendations in full.

The decision to preserve Naval Submarine Base New London in Groton, Conn., the nation's oldest sub base, and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, effectively preserved a major military presence in New England. It reflected concerns voiced repeatedly by commission members in the run-up to yesterday's voting that the proposed closures would hit New England too hard and risk leaving the region insufficiently protected.

National security considerations were cited by former president Jimmy Carter and retired admirals who lobbied the commission to reject the Pentagon's plan, which had called for the base's 18 submarines to be dispersed to sites in Virginia and Georgia. Local and regional officials highlighted the devastating economic impact that would result from the loss of more than 8,000 military and civilian jobs at the sub base and more than 4,000 jobs at the shipyard.

Presenting the motion to save the base, commissioner Lloyd W. "Fig" Newton, a retired Air Force general, warned that the Navy may not be able to reduce its fleet as fast as planned because of the possible emergence of new threats in Asia and elsewhere. "I find that it would be a big mistake to close it at this time," he said.

Anthony J. Principi, the commission chairman, said terminating the base -- which was established in 1868 as a coaling station and started taking submarines in 1915 -- would be irreversible. "If we close New London down, we will never get it back," he said.

Only James V. Hansen, a Republican former Utah congressman, objected to keeping the base open, saying doing so would mean excess capacity and empty piers in the future.

Commissioners also cited strategic considerations in justifying retention of Portsmouth, worrying that reducing the number of military shipyards from four to three would leave the nation with too little capacity to service the fleets in time of emergency. Principi also praised the facility, founded by President Thomas Jefferson in 1800, as "the gold standard" by which to measure shipyards and a model for labor-management relations.

The decisions were a huge relief in both communities.

"The Navy is part of the fabric of our community," Groton Mayor Harry Watson said of an area where the submarine base and related businesses generate \$3.3 billion in annual economic activity and account for 31,500 jobs, according to state estimates. "The Navy is everywhere."

By contrast, there was disappointment and anger in New Jersey where the commission voted to close Fort Monmouth and shift the Army's communications electronics command to Aberdeen Proving Ground, a change that will bring more than 4,000 jobs to Maryland. Estimated to save about \$1 billion, the transfer represents the Army's single largest economy move.

"We are going to fight this to the very end," declared Sen. Jon S. Corzine (D-N.J.), who said in a statement that he might vote against the entire base-closing package because of the decision.

Some of Fort Monmouth's jobs also will go to Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County, which could gain as many as 18,000 workers by the end of the realignment process. Fort Meade in Anne Arundel County could gain more than 5,000 jobs.

To keep Oceana open, the commission insisted on an array of zoning restrictions, land purchases and other changes that would ensure that naval aviators can continue to practice challenging maneuvers, including some that require jets to fly just 600 feet over surrounding neighborhoods.

If state and local leaders do not take those steps by next March and agree to spend at least \$15 million a year buying some developed land in a crash zone around the base, the commission will direct the Navy to move the base and its 15,000 military and civilian workers to a revived Cecil Field near Jacksonville, Fla.

Commission member Samuel K. Skinner, a former U.S. transportation secretary, said Virginia needs to "clean up the mess" that it made by allowing so much development so close to Oceana. Still, he and other commissioners believe that Virginia should be given a chance to fix the problems. But it must act by next March, or Florida would get the chance to reopen Cecil Field to about 140 F/A-18 Hornets and Super Hornets and about 50 F-14 Tomcats.

"There is a strong feeling that we owe one last chance to the people of Virginia to get their act together," Skinner said.

Virginia Gov. Mark R. Warner (D) and Sen. John W. Warner (R-Va.) vowed yesterday to work with local and federal officials to meet the commission's demands and keep Oceana open. The governor said it is unclear how much money the state will have to spend on reducing residential encroachment around the base.

Spokesmen for the Army and Navy declined to comment on yesterday's commission decisions, saying their services will have nothing official to say before the voting is completed and the administration can assess the results.

The Pentagon has proposed closing or consolidating more than 800 facilities to save nearly \$50 billion over 20 years and help refashion the armed forces to face 21st-century threats. Previous commissions (1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995) altered about 15 percent of what

the Pentagon proposed. But one new consideration overshadowing this year's process is the likely effect any changes will have on the military's ability to carry on the war in Iraq and sustain defensive operations at home.

That appeared to be an important factor, for instance, in the commission's decision to reject a Pentagon recommendation to close Red River Army Depot in Texas, which repairs Humvees and Bradley Fighting Vehicles and refurbishes missiles.

"With the nation being at war, this is the wrong time to be closing depots," declared commissioner James T. Hill, a retired Army general and former head of the Southern Command.

In other reversals, the commission also decided to keep open Hawthorne Army Depot in Nevada, Naval Support Activity Corona in California and Naval Support Activity in New Orleans.

But wartime and homeland defense arguments were not always sufficient to save a base. Contentions by Hansen, for instance, that defense along the Gulf of Mexico required retention of naval facilities at Ingleside and Corpus Christi, Tex., were rejected by other commissioners who approved the shift of minesweepers to San Diego.

Panel Rejects Pentagon Plan to Close Connecticut Base

New York Times

David S. Cloud and Christine Hauser
August 24, 2005

The independent commission reviewing a Department of Defense plan to shut or shrink hundreds of military bases nationwide voted today against closing the submarine base in Groton, Conn., and another New England naval installation that the Pentagon had said was no longer necessary.

On the first of several days of final deliberations, the nine-member commission recommended keeping open the Connecticut base and the

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in southeastern Maine, which provide an estimated \$2.9 billion in the overall estimated savings of nearly \$50 billion over the next twenty years.

But the panel, the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, also voted to close several major army bases, including Fort Monmouth, N.J., and to "realign" others, including part of the Naval Air Station in Oceana, Va., near Virginia Beach.

The commission's decisions to keep bases open were an early blow to the Pentagon closing list and vindication for the affected communities, which had been lobbying fiercely in the last few weeks to convince commissioners that the Defense Department was overestimating savings from closings and underestimating their military value.

In keeping open the two Navy installations and in several other votes, the commissioners indicated concern that, in its quest for billions in annual savings, the Pentagon plan closed too many large bases with critical capabilities and highly trained workers that several commissioners said could be needed in the future, because of military deployments in Iraq or for unanticipated national security threats.

Unlike the four previous base closing rounds, this one is unfolding during wartime when the military is expanding, prompting commission members to question whether Defense Department plans for retrenchment take full account of its future needs.

"Once we lose this place, we will not get it back," said Commissioner Philip E. Coyle III, a former Defense Department official, in arguing against the department's proposal to close the Portsmouth shipyard, which is on an island of Maine near the New Hampshire town of the same name. "I don't use my garage every hour of the day but I'm not about to tear it down," he added.

Much of the Pentagon plan survived intact. In daylong proceedings at a hotel ballroom a few miles from the Pentagon, the nine-member

Defense endorsed large parts of the blueprint to close or realign dozens of Army, Navy and multi-service installations.

As the commissioners worked crisply through the Pentagon list, knots of lobbyists and politicians from affected communities steadily exited the room, some looking relieved and some disappointed.

The panel is nearing the end of a process that could affect as many as 800 military facilities in all 50 states. Pentagon officials said that its blueprint would save about \$5.5 billion a year, after initial installations closing costs of \$24 billion were paid, and total 48.8 billion over 20 years.

The panel is expected to wrap up its work later this week after taking up Air Force installations. The commission's findings must be submitted by Sept. 8 to President Bush, who has the authority to make further changes before submitting the plan to Congress. The plan becomes law unless Congress passes a joint resolution rejecting the plan by 45 days.

Mr. Bush has said he will submit the plan without changes and key lawmakers say Congress will probably not intervene, giving this week's proceedings an air of finality.

Fort Monmouth has been a center for military communications development for decades. It has been home to carrier pigeons and, more recently, to satellite technology. It was known as Camp Little Silver when it was established in 1917 and was renamed in 1925 in honor of those who died in the Revolutionary War Battle of Monmouth, which was fought nearby.

The fort's closing would not only ring down more than 80 years of military history. It would cost New Jersey more than 5,000 jobs if it is indeed closed, but Maryland stands to gain some 2,000 jobs at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, which would take over much of Monmouth's functions.

The Pentagon plan to close Submarine Base New London in Groton involved moving its 18

attack submarines to bases in Georgia and Virginia, and in May, Adm. Vern Clark, who was then chief of naval operations but has since retired, suggested that the plan to shut down Groton was directly linked to the goal of having a smaller fleet of 41 attack subs.

But the commission has expressed skepticism about the projected savings of \$1.6 billion over 20 years with the closure.

Before voting 7 to 1, with one abstention, today to keep the base open, Lloyd W. Newton, a retired Air Force general and member of the commission, argued against the closing, citing data that indicated a threat level, particularly in Asia. He said that it would be a "big mistake" to close the facility, which he called a flagship, at this time.

The head of the commission, Anthony J. Principi, said any closure of Groton would be a "tragic loss."

Another commissioner, James Hansen, a former Utah congressman, said he was in the "infinitesimal minority. "It comes down to the idea that bases cost money," he said, adding that it is a "fantastic" base but "I would think there would be a big savings there."

The Groton base, the Portsmouth shipyard and Otis Air National Guard Base in Sandwich on Cape Cod are three of the largest installations in the New England region. Officials from five of New England's six states lobbied the commission last month to spare their states, saying the Pentagon used faulty information, inflated savings and incomplete criteria. They also argued that closings would leave the region without a strong military presence, imperil economies and jeopardize national security.

The region could have lost more than 12,000 civilian positions, about half the losses from closings nationwide. Senator Christopher J. Dodd of Connecticut, in a statement, called the Pentagon's proposal to close the Groton base "senseless" and said the commission, with their vote, "recognized how critically important this installation and the United States submarine

fleet are to meeting the military challenges of the 21st century."

In its discussion of Fort Monmouth before voting to close it, Mr. Coyle said that the Defense Department has proposed breaking up a well-established facility at the wrong time - a time of war - and sending the pieces to places not known as "world class centers of excellence."

He noted that Fort Monmouth provides daily support for the military in Iraq and Afghanistan, and played a role in homeland security, saying it supported the police and firefighters after the Sept. 11 attacks with technical support that included cameras to search for victims. Fort Monmouth pumps about \$1.4 billion into New Jersey each year, according to the Army.

Officials had lobbied to preserve the bases. New Jersey officials had argued that Fort Monmouth should be kept open because few of those civilian engineers are thought to be prepared to move to Maryland and the Army will suffer a loss of scientific talent when it is most needed.

Representative Rush Holt, whose district takes in much of Fort Monmouth, said today after the vote that the base was leading the effort to detect and disarm roadside bombs in Iraq.

Gen. James T. Hill, a retired Army officer on the panel, had said during deliberations, however, that the plan to consolidate was about the future and noted the closure of the base was the single largest army savings generator.

Several commissioners have said they are unconvinced by the Defense Department's claim that the recommendations would save nearly \$50 billion over 20 years, an estimate that was challenged in a July report by the Government Accountability Office.

The panel voted to conditionally move the East Coast Master Jet Base at the Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach, Va., to Cecil Field, Fla. It added that the transfer should take place unless State and City governments gave strong support to eliminate current and arrest future

encroachment. The panel's motion said that unless the governments acted, the military value of the facility over the long term would be "unacceptably degraded."

The commission also voted unanimously to close the Pascagoula Naval Station in Mississippi, after discussing community concerns about whether that action would degrade homeland defense monitoring incoming naval traffic. But Adm. Harold W. Gehman Jr., a retired Navy officer on the panel, said other facilities could take up the slack, and that a decision to close it was a "no-brainer."

On the Red River Army Depot, there were arguments also that now was the wrong time to close it and that vehicle maintenance was key to the people serving. "It has to be put off to another time", said Samuel K. Skinner, a commission member who is a former chief of staff to the first President Bush. The commission voted to keep the facility while moving part of its operations elsewhere.

Air Force officials made a final public plea on Saturday for their plan to overhaul more than two dozen Air National Guard units, warning that the squadrons would steadily become more ineffective and poorly equipped unless their proposal was approved.

The nine-member panel also signed off on closing nearly 400 Army Reserve and National Guard facilities in dozens of states, creating instead new joint centers, and sided with the Pentagon in closing Fort McPherson in Georgia, Fort Monroe in Virginia, and the U.S. Army Garrison in Selfridge, Mich.

Fort Monroe was completed in 1834 and was once known as the "Gibraltar of Chesapeake Bay" because of its strategic location at the entrance to Hampton Roads. During the Civil War, it was vital to Union efforts to keep control of the coasts of the Carolinas. It is now headquarters of the Army's Training Command. More than 4,000 military and civilian people work there.

Panel bucks Pentagon on some military base closings

USA TODAY

Steven Komarow

August 24, 2005

A federal commission rejected on Wednesday the Pentagon's plan to shut down two historic Navy bases in New England that would have eliminated the jobs of 12,000 workers and threaten hundreds of businesses.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission spared Naval Submarine Base New London in Connecticut and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, after an intense lobbying campaign from politicians, economists and former Defense officials.

The vote to keep open the 137-year-old sub base and the shipyard, established in 1800, was among the most significant departures from a Pentagon plan to save \$48.8 billion by closing hundreds of facilities it says are not needed.

The nine-member panel voted to close Army bases in Michigan and Georgia and shutter nearly 400 Army Reserve and National Guard facilities in many states.

People in communities around the preserved bases were ecstatic. "Yee-ha! That's what we've been waiting for," shouted Steve Walsh of Berwick, Maine, a worker at the Portsmouth shipyard.

"Everybody has been sweating this," said Army veteran Kestermount Anck-Su-Namun in Groton, Conn. She was sitting in her car at an intersection as other cars streamed by with horns honking.

The commission's final recommendations will be sent to President Bush for approval. Bush has said he does not intend on overruling them. Congress then must vote. Lawmakers can accept or reject the list but can't change it.

The New London sub base has 8,400 military and civilian workers; the Portsmouth yard employs 4,500. The Pentagon plan was to move New London's 16 subs to other bases, such as

one in Virginia. Economists provided testimony that shutdowns would harm 31,000 private-sector jobs that rely on the bases for part of their work. Connecticut lawmakers said the shutdown would have left New England without a major Navy base, a bad move at a time of war.

The commission saw "much more than dollars at stake," Connecticut Gov. M. Jodi Rell said. "They saw a modern submarine base and the best well-trained submarine force in the world."

Closing the base "would be a tragic mistake," said Anthony Principi, chairman of the commission. He also called Portsmouth the "gold standard" for shipyards.

Also spared: the Red River Army Depot in Texas; Navy facilities in Corona, Calif., and New Orleans; and smaller bases. The commission added the naval air station in Brunswick, Maine, to the closings list.

Later this week the commission will consider controversial plans to remove airplanes from two dozen Air National Guard bases, in some cases replacing them with unmanned drones such as the Predator.

In New England, Sighs of Relief as Commission Votes to Save Submarine Base

New York Times
William Yardley and Katie Zezima
August 25, 2005

In hearings, rallies, letters and late-night phone calls, they sounded ominous warnings about the consequences of closing the Navy submarine base here: The Pentagon would not save nearly as much as it expected. The national defense would be weakened. The environmental cleanup would be costly.

But perhaps the biggest fear of the politicians, retired admirals and business leaders heading the effort was that in losing this historic base and the 205-year-old Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Me., New England and much of the Northeast would be left without any significant

military presence, and local economies would be devastated.

On Wednesday, after an independent federal commission rejected the Defense Department's proposal to include the two bases in the latest wave of closings, there was joy and relief, from whoops in small-town streets to congratulatory calls in Congressional offices.

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, Democrat of Connecticut, joked that the commission's chairman, Anthony J. Principi, had his vote for president. The chairwoman of the Kittery Town Council declared, "Our town is going to stay intact." And the region's military and manufacturing industries, which have seen jobs and the Pentagon's interest shift to bases in the South and West, exhaled deeply after three months of lobbying and worrying.

Representative Rob Simmons, a Republican whose district includes the Groton base, saluted the commission after the vote. "New England," he said later, "is fighting back."

The region, which stood to lose 13,000 on-site jobs just from closing the Groton and Kittery bases, seemed the unlikely winner on the first day of votes by the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, meeting in Arlington, Va. The Pentagon, which announced the planned closings in May, had said that shuttering the Groton base would save about \$1.6 billion over 20 years and that closing the Portsmouth yard would save about \$1.3 billion - more than any other naval base on its list.

Not every New England base was saved. The commission voted to close the Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine, against the Pentagon's recommendations. Otis Air National Guard Base on Cape Cod did not come up for a vote on Wednesday. Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, said the decisions to keep the other bases open showed that commission members were "serious in their concerns that the Pentagon's recommendations leave the Northeast undefended."

The commission, also known as BRAC for base realignment and closure, decided to close some smaller bases in Connecticut, and the Army research base at Fort Monmouth, N.J. But in a wrinkle that gave New Jersey politicians hope, the commission said the research base should not be closed immediately if that would hurt the fight against terrorism.

For all the worry over the region's economy and military presence, those fighting to keep the bases open appealed to the commission mainly on issues of military spending and national defense - factors that the commission considers when deciding whether to remove a base from the Pentagon's proposed list.

"Military value trumps everything," Mr. Simmons said. "We all knew that."

Connecticut officials said the Pentagon had ignored the most distinctive assets of the Groton base: its school for training submariners and its proximity, just a few miles up the Thames River, from Electric Boat, the Navy's primary submarine builder and repairer. They also said that closing the base, officially called the Naval Submarine Base New London, for Groton's neighboring town, would diminish the submarine force while other countries were investing in submarines and nuclear weapons.

Those arguments seemed to carry weight with the majority of the nine-member commission, which voted 7 to 1, with 1 abstention, to keep the base open.

"The New London submarine base is more than piers and parking spaces for nuclear-powered submarines," Mr. Principi, the chairman and a former secretary of veterans affairs, said Wednesday. "It is truly the center of excellence in submarine warfare" and "would be very, very difficult to replicate at another location."

He also touched on a continuing debate within the Navy over whether the current fleet of about 54 nuclear-powered attack submarines should be reduced or increased.

"The emerging nuclear threat that we are facing in the world today leaves uncertain the force structure of nuclear-powered submarines of the future," Mr. Principi said. "If we close New London down, we would never get it back. I think it would be a tragic mistake, a tragic loss for this nation."

The commission vote to keep open the Portsmouth shipyard was also 7 to 1. The yard is on the border between Maine and New Hampshire, and officials from both states fought its closing with an argument rooted in pride, work ethic and economics. They argued that the base consistently fixed submarines under budget and on time, returning them to fleets faster than any other shipyard in the country. It would take nearly a decade, they said, to train nuclear submarine technicians fully with similar skills.

In July, Portsmouth workers clad in yellow "Save Our Shipyard" T-shirts showed up at commission hearings in Boston. At the shipyard on Wednesday, someone hung a large sign bearing that slogan, but tacked a "d" onto the "Save."

In Connecticut, state economists had estimated that closing the Groton base could endanger 22,000 private sector jobs, many of them in high-tech businesses, in addition to the 8,500 on the base itself. But on Wednesday, workers across the economic spectrum expressed relief.

"Uniforms, dry-cleaning, wash-and-fold - they're at least 90 percent of our business," said Tanya Stonick, an attendant at Pop's Kitchen, Mum's Washtub, just up Route 12 from the submarine base. "I'm feeling like my job was saved today."

Base panel votes to keep Portsmouth and Groton Brunswick unit is still facing closure, sale

Boston Globe
Bryan Bender
August 25, 2005

A federal review panel yesterday rejected Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld's recommendations and voted to keep open the

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, and the submarine base in Groton, Conn. The decision came as a major relief for New England, which had stood to lose the most jobs of any US region under the Pentagon plan.

After reviewing the Pentagon's proposals and hearing intense arguments from lawmakers, seven of nine members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission concluded that Portsmouth's submarine repair and overhaul capacity and Groton's role as the nation's oldest operating submarine base are simply too important to national security, particularly at a time when naval threats remain uncertain.

"It is the gold standard by which we should measure shipyards," the commission's chairman, Anthony Principi, said before the panel voted to retain the Portsmouth yard, which first opened in 1800 and now employs an estimated 4,500 workers.

Principi also argued for saving Submarine Base New London in Groton and its 8,600 employees, describing the facility as "more than piers and parking places for nuclear-powered submarines. It is truly a center of excellence for submarine warfare." Principi said closing it would be "a tragic loss to this nation."

In another Pentagon rebuff, the panel voted to shut the Brunswick Naval Air Station in Brunswick, Maine, and to sell the land.

This would mean the base's land, rather than stay in the military's possession, would be developed privately, after the aircraft and the personnel are reassigned.

This way, the commissioners argued, the surrounding community might more easily rebound from more than 4,000 expected job losses, by having the opportunity to redevelop the oceanfront site.

Elected leaders from across New England were elated, hailing the Portsmouth and Groton reversals as a testament to the region's military value, and to the strength of a bipartisan campaign.

"How sweet it is," Senator Judd Gregg, a New Hampshire Republican, said in an interview. "We had a high hurdle to get over, but we did it."

"Awesome!" said Representative Christopher Shays, a Connecticut Republican, reacting to news that Groton would be spared.

Senator John F. Kerry, Democrat of Massachusetts, said in a statement that the commission had recognized that "Massachusetts and the Northeast have defended America since the very beginning -- it's part of our history."

The votes yesterday signaled the start of final deliberations for the 2005 BRAC commission, which was established by Congress to oversee the largest consolidation of domestic military bases since the end of the Cold War. Rumsfeld has said the plan could save the military as much as \$50 billion over two decades, though outside analysts dispute that figure.

Over the summer, the commission and its staff members held hearings across the country and pored over millions of documents before giving its final say on the Pentagon's plan. Their deliberations will continue today, tomorrow, and Saturday if needed.

President Bush is scheduled to receive the panel's final report on Sept. 8. He will have two weeks either to approve or to reject the entire list. Congress will then have 45 days to act before the result becomes law. The commission, which weighed in on Navy and Army bases yesterday, approved most of the Pentagon's proposals.

But from the start, the military's decisions to close both Portsmouth and Groton and to shift their missions elsewhere were among the more controversial of Rumsfeld's proposals.

When they heard the news in May, Republican and Democratic lawmakers in Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts -- which has an economic stake in Portsmouth, just across the New Hampshire state line -- joined

forces with related industries and labor unions to launch a counterattack.

They inundated the commission with letters, testimonials, and analyses showing the military and economic value of the bases. Their arguments centered on fears that New England would lose two of its few remaining military facilities, leaving the area vulnerable.

They contended that the Pentagon has more than enough work to justify keeping all four of its shipyards open, and that it had underestimated the future needs of the Navy's submarine fleet.

The campaign to save the Groton base, home to the Navy Submarine School and to 16 attack subs, included more than a dozen retired admirals and President Carter. Carter, a retired submarine officer, had made a plea this week to save the base, even though the Pentagon had wanted to move some of the submarines in Groton to his home state of Georgia.

Ultimately, commissioners said Groton's record and its "synergy" with the neighboring Electric Boat Corp., one of the premier US shipbuilders, had made the submarine base essential.

That opinion, however, was not unanimous. Commissioner James Hansen, a former Republican representative from Utah, voted against keeping Groton open.

Hansen warned that as the number of US attack submarines shrink from a Cold War high of 90 to fewer than 50, "we're going to have some vacant piers."

Others said the Navy will fall far short of projected savings.

Chris Hellman, a base closure specialist at the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, said closing Portsmouth and Groton together had accounted for almost \$2 billion of the Navy's \$7 billion in projected savings. "That's pretty dramatic. You just lost about 30 percent of your projected income," he said.

But for the local communities involved the news could not have been much brighter.

"Today is a great day for the shipyard and its highly skilled workforce," Senator John Sununu, a New Hampshire Republican, said of Portsmouth.

The one exception amid the euphoria was the fate of Brunswick, which the commission opted to close for good rather than mothball for possible future use.

The commission concluded that the maritime air patrols the base conducts with antiquated P-3 aircraft could be performed by other bases in the region, especially because the P-3 will soon be replaced with modified Boeing jetliners that can operate out of civilian airports. At the same time, it said the Pentagon could double its savings by jettisoning all control of the base and giving the local community a chance to redevelop the land.

Senator Olympia J. Snowe, a Maine Republican who led the effort to save Brunswick, vowed to fight for federal aid for the region, including legislation that would require the Pentagon to turn over the land to Brunswick for free. "The key for us now is to see what we can do to help mitigate the economic loss of the base," she said.

The commission will take up more deliberations today, including a decision on a recommendation to move the fighter wing from Otis Air Guard Base on Cape Cod and expand Hanscom Air Force Base in Bedford.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, said yesterday's decisions bode well for Otis: "It shows that they are serious in their concerns that the Pentagon's recommendations leave the Northeast undefended."

Commission Voting on Closing Bases Across Nation

Associated Press (NY Times)
August 24, 2005

Bucking the Pentagon, a federal commission preserved a major military presence in New

England on Wednesday by keeping open two historic Navy facilities that together provide 12,000 jobs for a defense-dependent economy.

The independent panel sped through the first day of its final decisions on the plan it will send to President Bush, who can accept it or reject it in its entirety. Congress also will have a chance to veto the plan, but has not taken that step in four previous rounds of closures.

The commission signed off on most of the Pentagon's plans to close, shrink or expand hundreds of small and large Army and Navy facilities from coast to coast. It has yet to take up any Air Force proposals, including the contentious question of whether the service can strip aircraft from about two dozen Air National Guard facilities across the country.

Later this week, the commission will consider that proposal as well as the one that has caused the most political consternation, the Air Force's attempt to close Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, home to freshman Sen. John Thune. He argued during the 2004 campaign that he -- not Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle -- would be in a better position to save the facility, but it showed up on the Pentagon's closure list anyway.

In some of its first decisions, the commission voted to keep open several major Army and Navy bases that military planners want to shut down, including the Portsmouth shipyard in Kittery, Maine, and the New London submarine base in Groton, Conn., two of the Navy's oldest bases.

"Yahoo!" exclaimed Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn. "Submarine base New London lives, and I think that it will live forever."

Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., who urged the commission to save the shipyard in Maine near the New Hampshire border, added: "This is a sweet victory."

Congressional delegations, retired Navy officers and others had fiercely lobbied the commission to spare the two bases, arguing that the

economic impact would be devastating and the region would be unprotected in the face of terrorist threats. Commissioners had the same concerns.

The survival of the two bases marked big wins for New England congressional delegations and governors. Even as the commission was voting, elected officials from those and other states -- such as Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida and Thune -- attended the hearing and served as visual reminders of their efforts.

Some analysts have said closing both the shipyard and the submarine base would devastated the economy along the coast from Maine to Rhode Island. Loss of the submarine base, which former President Carter, a dozen admirals and high-ranking Congress members opposed, would have cost about 8,000 jobs, and closing the shipyard would have cost 4,000, some estimated. Many more jobs at businesses that depend on the bases also were at risk.

The commission did, however, decide to close Naval Air Station Brunswick in Maine, rather than drastically reduce forces there as the Pentagon wanted. Commissioners argued that savings could be realized more quickly if it were shut down altogether.

"They have proved they are not a rubber stamp," said David Berteau, Pentagon official who oversaw base closings for the Pentagon in 1991 and 1993. "But we don't know yet what the common theme is because they're dealing with each of these on a case-by-case basis."

In other moves, the commission:

--Decided to keep open several other major bases the Pentagon wanted to close, including the Naval Support Activity Corona in California, the Red River Army Depot in Texas and Naval Support Activity in New Orleans.

--Voted to retain two Navy bases it had considered shutting down -- the Broadway Complex in San Diego, Calif., and the jet training base in Oceana, Va. In a highly unusual

move, however, the commission added conditions to those decisions.

--Approved the closure of hundreds of Navy Reserve and Army Reserve and National Guard facilities in dozens of states, in favor of consolidating units at fewer locations.

Before voting started, commission chairman Anthony Principi said the task was especially difficult because Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's proposal included more than double the recommendations in the four previous rounds of base closings combined.

Principi said the commission recognized that closing bases was necessary to save money and transform the military to meet new challenges.

"At the same time, we know that the decisions we reach will have a profound impact on the communities hosting our military installations, and more importantly, on the people who bring those communities to life," he said.

To reject a recommendation, the commission had to find that the Pentagon substantially deviated from criteria that focused mainly on the military value of each facility.

Previous commissions -- in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995 -- altered about 15 percent of what the Pentagon proposed in seeking to get rid of bases considered no longer needed. This round was also affected by the post-Sept. 11 threat of terrorism.

The Pentagon proposed closing or consolidating a record 62 major military bases and 775 smaller installations to save \$48.8 billion over 20 years, streamline the services and reposition the armed forces.

Since the Pentagon announced its proposal in May, commissioners had voiced concerns about several parts of it, including the estimate of how much money would be saved.

Commission blocks closure of major military facilities

Associated Press (USA Today)

August 24, 2005

Overruling the Pentagon on two of its biggest requests, a commission reviewing base closings voted to keep open a shipyard and a submarine base in New England that military planners wanted to shut down.

The panel also spared three other major facilities, in Texas, California and Louisiana, against the Pentagon's wishes.

But it was New England that got arguably the biggest victories of the day: the commission voted to save two of the Navy's oldest facilities — the Portsmouth shipyard at Kittery, Maine, and Submarine Base New London in Connecticut. Together, the bases are considered economic engines of their region and elected officials from Maine, New Hampshire and Connecticut lobbied intently for months to save them.

"Yahoo!" said Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn. "Submarine base New London lives, and I think that it will live forever."

Taken together, the survival of the two bases marked big wins for New England congressional delegations and governors, who fiercely lobbied against the Pentagon plan. Even as the commission was voting, elected officials from those and other states — such as Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas — attended the hearing and served as visual reminders of their efforts.

The commission did, however, decide to close Naval Air Station Brunswick in Maine, rather than drastically reduce forces there as the Pentagon wanted. Commissioners argued that savings could be realized more quickly if it was shut down altogether.

Over the past four months, the nine-member panel has expressed worries that Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's proposal would leave the Northeast unprotected.

"If we close New London down, we will never get it back," the commission's chairman,

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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Anthony Principi, said Wednesday. "I think it would be a tragic mistake, a tragic loss for this nation."

But the decisions to spare both the submarine base and the shipyard were somewhat surprising. Lobbyists and some lawmakers had privately speculated that the panel would save one base and scrap the other.

In the end, the panel sided with community groups and lawmakers from the Northeast. Analysts have said closing both the shipyard and the submarine base would devastate the economy along the coast from Maine to Rhode Island. Loss of the submarine base, which former President Carter, a dozen admirals and high-ranking Congress members urged saved, would have cost about 8,000 jobs and closing the shipyard would have cost 4,000 jobs. Many more jobs at businesses that depend on the bases also were at risk.

"This is a sweet victory," said Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., who was among the Congress members who lobbied the commission to save the shipyard in Maine near the New Hampshire border.

In other reversals, the commission kept open, rather than closed Naval Support Activity Corona in California, the Red River Army Depot in Texas and Naval Support Activity in New Orleans.

Lobbying efforts to save other major bases failed. The panel sided with the Pentagon in shutting down five large Army bases and four big Navy installations.

The panel also signed off on closing hundreds of Navy Reserve and Army Reserve and National Guard facilities in dozens of states.

Wednesday began a three-day series of votes planned before the commission sends its final report next month to President Bush, who could make his own changes. Congress also will get the chance to reject the plan after Bush considers it. Lawmakers haven't done that in previous rounds.

Before voting started, Principi said the task was especially difficult because Rumsfeld's proposal included more than double the recommendations in the four previous rounds of base closings combined.

Principi said the commission recognizes that closing bases is necessary to save money and transform the military to meet new challenges.

"At the same time, we know that the decisions we reach will have a profound impact on the communities hosting our military installations, and more importantly, on the people who bring those communities to life," he said.

To reject a recommendation, the commission had to find that the Pentagon substantially deviated from criteria that focuses mainly on the military value of each facility.

Previous commissions — in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995 — altered about 15% of what the Pentagon proposed as it sought to get rid of bases considered no longer needed. But analysts say the post-Sept. 11 threat of terrorism makes this time different.

"It's not about just trying to get rid of excess capacity. It's actually about trying to reorganize the forces for future challenges," said Loren Thompson, a military analyst with the Lexington Institute, a think tank in Arlington, Va.

On Tuesday, Rumsfeld was optimistic his plan would remain largely intact, predicting the commission would endorse "the overwhelming majority" of his recommendations.

The Pentagon proposed closing or consolidating a record 62 major military bases and 775 smaller installations to save \$48.8 billion over 20 years, streamline the services and reposition the armed forces to face current threats.

Since the Pentagon announced its proposal in May, commissioners reviewing the plan have voiced serious concerns about several parts of it, including the Pentagon's estimate of how much money will be saved.

Among the contentious issues remaining to be decided is the Air Force's proposal to strip aircraft from about two dozen Air National Guard facilities.

The Air Force's attempt to close Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, home to freshman Republican Sen. John Thune, has stirred the most political consternation. Thune argued during the 2004 campaign that he — not Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle — would be in a better position to save the facility.

The panel must send its final proposal to Bush by Sept. 8. The president can accept the report or order the commission to make changes. Then, Congress must reject the report altogether or it becomes law.

**Monroe, Monmouth, Gillem,
McPherson, to close**

Army Times
Gordon Trowbridge
August 24, 2005

Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan weighed heavily on the independent base closings commission as it opened its deliberations on Wednesday, as commissioners rejected a Pentagon plan to close the Army's main vehicle repair depot in Texas but approved closing of research facilities at Fort Monmouth, N.J.

Commissioners said they were deeply concerned that closing Red River Army Depot, Texas, would disrupt the Army's ability to rebuild Humvees, Bradley Fighting Vehicles and other equipment heavily used in Iraq and Afghanistan. But most were not persuaded by arguments that Fort Monmouth's technical support for the war would be in danger if the base is closed.

The Monmouth move involves roughly 5,000 civilian workers, most of whom will shift to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. Red River will retain about 2,000 jobs that would have been moved or eliminated if the Army succeeded in closing the plant.

The panel voted seven to one, with one abstention, to approve closing Monmouth,

despite a vigorous defense of the base from Commissioner Phillip Coyle, a former head of weapons testing at the Pentagon.

The move shifts several research, development and testing organizations at Monmouth, along with smaller organizations at Fort Knox, Ky., Redstone Arsenal, Ala., and in Arlington, Va. Those shifts to Aberdeen would create a "center of excellence" in development of command, control, computing and intelligence systems, Army officials say.

Coyle argued that closing Monmouth would disrupt the base's work in those fields, and that the Army would lose as much of 80 percent of the technical workforce at the base.

Research at Monmouth "is the electronic lifeline for our military now and into the future. We should not cut this lifeline."

Other commissioners, including retired Army Gen. James Hill, said they believed promises from Army Secretary Francis Harvey during a Saturday hearing that the move would not disrupt ongoing operations.

The commission did adopt language calling on the Defense Department to ensure both that support for operations is not disrupted and that the Pentagon make efforts to retain skilled workers.

Commissioners unanimously approved a measure to keep Red River open, stripping only a small number of jobs in munitions and missile work from the plant.

Red River handles maintenance of Humvees and other ground vehicles for the Army. The Pentagon plan would have eliminated what the Army called excess capacity in vehicle repairs, and moved Red River's work to facilities in Alabama, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Oklahoma.

"In the state of war that we're in, I think it would be a mistake to take away that capacity," retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd Newton said in support of the change.

The commission's measure would move 136 workers to other installations and eliminate 220 jobs. The original Pentagon proposal would have shed about 2,500 jobs.

The commission approved a number of other Army measures, including closing Fort Gillem, Ga., and reorganizing National Guard and Army Reserve centers in dozens of states. Several other Army measures, including a recommendation to close Fort Eustis, Va., and several other industrial plants, will be considered later this week.

New London, Portsmouth to stay open; Oceana gets another chance

Navy Times
Gordon Trowbridge
August 24, 2005

The independent base closings commission Wednesday rejected Navy recommendations to close Submarine Base New London and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, and gave Virginia and the Navy one last chance to save Naval Station Oceana.

Tackling three of the most controversial topics over the four months since the Pentagon made its closing recommendations in May, the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission turned down Pentagon arguments in each case.

On Oceana, commissioners made it clear they believe the Virginia Beach, Va., base is not the best place for the Navy's East Coast fighter fleet — but did not vote to close it.

"Ten years, 15 years from now, Oceana cannot be the future of naval aviation," said Commissioner James Hill, a retired Army general.

While it did not vote to close the base, the panel placed extraordinary requirements on local and state governments, including a requirement to spend at least \$50 million a year to buy property near the base to eliminate development that hampers operations there. If that and other steps are not in place within six months, the commission directed the Navy to move

Oceana's fighters to Cecil Field, Fla., which shut down in a previous base-closing round.

Virginia Beach officials attending the hearing just outside Washington, D.C., said they did not yet know if they could comply with the commission's requirements.

The panel also directed the Defense Department to undertake a study of a longterm replacement for Oceana as the Navy's East Coast master jet base, and to include Cecil Field, near Jacksonville, Fla., in that analysis.

Jobs vs. savings

By denying requests to close Submarine Base New London and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the commission passed up as much as \$3 billion in savings, but saved roughly 13,000 jobs in New England.

The panel voted to keep the Connecticut sub base, citing concerns that the closing would handicap the future submarine fleet and disrupt the historic home of the sub community. And commissioners found that there was not enough excess capacity in naval shipyards to close Portsmouth, in Kittery, Maine.

The votes are an enormous victory for New England officials who had vigorously attacked the closings, saying they would badly damage the region's economy and essentially divorce the military from the Northeastern United States.

But they are likely to draw protests from Navy officials, who have said planned savings from the closings are vital to their modernization efforts.

The commission made other changes to Navy proposals. It rejected plans to close the naval facility at Corona, Calif., and Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine. The Navy had wanted to leave the Brunswick base open but move its P-3 patrol aircraft to Jacksonville, Fla.

The New London recommendation would have cost the Groton area more than 8,600 jobs. But

economic issues got less attention than the base's history and future threats to the nation.

"It would be a big mistake to close this facility at this time," said Commissioner Lloyd Newton, a retired Air Force general, citing potential future threats from China's expanding submarine fleet.

Anthony Principi, the commission's chairman, said closing New London "would be a tragic mistake, a tragic loss to this nation."

The commission voted 7-1 to retain the base, with one abstention. Former Rep. James Hansen was the only vote to close, saying the Navy's plans to shrink from roughly 100 fast-attack submarines during the Cold War to as few as 41 in the future requires a consolidation of submarine infrastructure.

"We're going to have some vacant piers," Hansen said. "It comes down to the idea that bases cost money."

Navy officials argued hard for the plan, saying the Navy's future is with a smaller sub fleet and that projected savings from closing the base — roughly \$1.6 billion over 20 years — are badly needed for the Navy's modernization efforts and to help meet manpower reduction goals.

The Navy's plan would have moved New London's 17 subs to Kings Bay, Ga., and Norfolk, Va. The Navy's submarine training school and several smaller organizations also would have moved.

Commissioners were persuaded by several arguments, including warnings from officials of sub builder Electric Boat Corp. that moving the base, next door to the company's facilities, would damage important relationships that improve construction and crew performance and save money.

The Pentagon estimated that closing Portsmouth would save nearly \$1.3 million over 20 years, eliminating 201 military and 4,000 civilian jobs.

But the commission's staff found that closing the yard would leave the Navy's three remaining shipyards with just 8 percent excess capacity — not enough to satisfy commissioners who worried that the Navy could not meet a surge of ship repair.

"All human activity must involve some amount of excess capacity," said Commissioner Phillip Coyle. "I don't use my garage 24 hours a day, but I'm not about to tear it down."

The panel also rejected the closing of Naval Support Activity Corona, Calif., a small station with about 230 workers, roughly half civilian, who are involved in independent analysis of weapons system performance. Based on revised Navy estimates, the panel determined the closing would actually cost the Navy money.

Several commissioners said the vote to close Brunswick was largely a cost-savings measure — closing a base already deprived of its aircraft would double the savings to the Pentagon, said commissioner Harold Gehman, a retired Navy admiral. The Navy estimated its original plan would save about \$230 million over 20 years.

The panel also voted 5-2, with two abstentions, to approve the closing of Naval Station Ingleside and Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, moving mine warfare assets from the Texas bases to fleet bases in San Diego and Norfolk.

Local Leaders Celebrate the Good News About Groton

Associated Press (NY Times)
August 24, 2005

Calling it a "center for excellence," the national base closure commission voted Wednesday to keep open the Navy's submarine base in Groton, saving thousands of jobs and a cornerstone of southeastern Connecticut's economy.

"Yahoo!" said U.S. Senator Joe Lieberman, D-Conn. "Submarine base New London lives, and I think that it will live forever."

The commission voted 7-1 with one abstention to keep the base open, culminating a fierce

lobbying effort by Connecticut officials since the base appeared on the Pentagon's proposed list of base closings on May 13. Connecticut lawmakers inundated the BRAC commissioners with data, reports and letters in an effort to reverse the Pentagon decision.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell said she was in tears as she listened to the decision while in her car on the way to New London. The governor said she had someone in her office hold a phone to a television set so she could hear the vote.

"We did it! We did it!" Rell said. "We knew our odds were long, but we also knew our cause was just. The BRAC Commission saw what the Department of Defense did not want to see. They saw more than dollars and cents. They saw the unparalleled military value of our sub base."

Just before casting his vote, BRAC Chairman Anthony Principi said the submarine base couldn't be replaced. "The New London sub base is truly the center of excellence," he said.

Economists have said closing the base would devastate the state's economy and threaten 31,000 jobs statewide, including more than 8,000 at the base itself and thousands of others who do subcontracting or provide support for the facility and its residents. The base is the Navy's oldest submarine base, established in 1868.

"Oh God, I'm so excited," said U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, a Republican who won a close election by campaigning to save the base. "We're marathon runners, and marathon runners focus on the goal. The goal was always today and we wanted to pace ourselves for today. We broke the tape today. We won."

Local and regional officials had argued that the Pentagon's recommendation to close the base was flawed, citing national security concerns, submarine force requirements, environmental cleanup costs, personnel needs and detailed reports challenging the Navy's projected cost savings.

In addition, lawmakers took issue with the Navy's assertion that an environmental cleanup

would cost about \$23 million and Pentagon officials last month acknowledged it may be too early to tell what the actual cost would be.

"As the commission's decision showed, our case was rock solid, based on the true military value and cost assessments of Navel Submarine Base New London, said U.S. Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn. "The commission heard our arguments loud and clear, thanks in no small part to the incredible teamwork displayed by Team Connecticut."

Retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd "Fig" Newton, one of seven commissioners who voted to keep the base open, said it would be a mistake to close the base.

"Not only is Sub Base New London a first-class facility, it's the flagship of the submarine facility," he said.

The Pentagon's base closure plan is the first such effort in a decade to reconfigure stateside military bases. The Groton base made the proposed closure list in 1993, but was saved after an effort by legislators, business owners and residents.

Earlier Wednesday the commission unanimously voted to close three army reserve centers in Connecticut -- the Sgt. Libby U.S. Army Reserve Center in New Haven, Turner U.S. Army Reserve Center in Fairfield and U.S. Army Reserve Center Maintenance Support Facility in Middletown. About 56 jobs will be lost as a result of that vote, according to Pentagon estimates.

Pentagon Plan to Cut Bases Derailed

Los Angeles Times

John Hendren

August 25, 2005

The commission deciding the future of U.S. military bases voted Wednesday to block the proposed shutdown of two major installations in New England, a major reversal for a Pentagon plan that critics said would have "demilitarized" the Northeast.

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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The move by the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission came as a dramatic and unusual rebuke of the Bush administration's approach to restructuring the nation's defenses, and it marked the sharpest disagreement between the Pentagon and any review panel in 17 years of military cutbacks that were triggered by the end of the Cold War.

Rejecting the Defense Department's plan to leave New England without a major active-duty military presence, the commission overturned the recommendation to close the Naval Submarine Base New London at Groton, Conn., and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine.

The moves would have affected 13,000 military and civilian employees.

The commission's action followed several months of hearings at which panel members heard appeals from state officials supporting local military bases who disputed Pentagon economic and military projections.

But the decisions made by the base closing commission also highlighted differences between many defense experts and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld over his emphasis on a lighter, faster and more lethal military. In the case of the Connecticut submarine base, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, three former chiefs of naval operations and other retired high-ranking Navy officers opposed the Pentagon's recommendations, said Anthony J. Principi, the chairman of the base closure commission who was the secretary of Veterans Affairs during President Bush's first term.

The reversals were the most prominent in an era of sweeping changes to the Pentagon's blueprint for the nation's future military base structure. The commission also reversed the Pentagon's proposal to close the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Norco and disagreed with other recommendations.

"I think they have shown they are independent," said Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas), who

attended the first of several days of the base closure commission's final deliberations.

The Pentagon issued its recommendations for base closures and reorganization in May after the various military branches studied their future needs. Under federal law, the president appoints a nine-member panel in consultation with congressional leaders — the law requires he consult with Republican and Democratic leaders — to review the recommendations.

After acting on the Pentagon's recommendations, the commission will give Bush its report Sept. 8. He may forward it to Congress or send it back to the commission, but the final reorganization plan must go to Congress by Nov. 7.

In its first day of formal votes, the commission set aside Rumsfeld's concern that it would be "risky" to make changes to the Pentagon's recommendations. Retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd W. "Fig" Newton, a Connecticut resident, disputed the Defense secretary's findings that the New London submarine base represented excess capacity. Newton called it "a first-class facility," adding, "It's the flagship of the submarine facilities.

"I find it would be a big mistake to close this facility at this particular time," he said.

Principi "strongly" agreed and rejected Pentagon arguments that other submarine bases in Virginia and Georgia provided sufficient space for a force of about 55 fast-attack vessels.

"New London submarine base is more than piers and parking spaces for nuclear-powered submarines," Principi said. "It is truly the center of excellence in submarine warfare."

Principi said the submarine base with surrounding support facilities "would be very, very difficult to replicate at another location."

Both Principi and Newton said emerging threats from Asia required continued naval readiness, apparently referring to China's growing navy.

"If we close New London down, we will never get it back," Principi said. "I believe it would be a tragic mistake, a tragic loss to this nation, if this recommendation was to be approved."

Commissioner Samuel K. Skinner, who served as chief of staff to President George H.W. Bush, criticized Rumsfeld for not presenting panel members with other submarine options, including the possibility of closing one of the other East Coast bases.

"I think the secretary picked the wrong one to eliminate," Skinner said. "It is the center of excellence. It has been the center of excellence. I wish the secretary had chosen another one."

The decisions to save the two New England bases, as expected, drew euphoric praise from Northeastern lawmakers.

"Simply put, the commission did not accept the Navy's contention that there is enough excess capacity," Sen. Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine) said. "I commend the commission for doing their own analysis of shipyard capacity."

Acting on other California installations, the base closure panel voted to give the Navy until Jan. 1, 2007, to settle on a redevelopment plan for the 14-acre Navy Broadway Complex on the San Diego waterfront, a process that is underway.

That decision was hailed by Rep. Susan A. Davis (D-San Diego) and Deputy Mayor Toni Atkins as a victory for the city, the port district and the Navy. Local officials had worried that the commission would put the complex on the closure list, which could have scuttled the redevelopment plans.

San Diego-area officials were also pleased by the commission's decision to endorse closing Naval Station Ingleside in Texas and relocate 10 ships to San Diego.

"This is what the city and the Navy both wanted. It provides for the continuing redevelopment of San Diego's downtown waterfront, as well as for a new headquarters for the Navy's southwest region," Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) said.

Feinstein noted that votes today or Friday could cut other California sites. Commission action is expected on the Naval Postgraduate School and the Defense Language Institute, both in Monterey.

The scope of the alterations and the brisk pace of the commission's work left analysts and lawmakers predicting major changes to the Pentagon's proposed list. Review panels in four previous base-closing rounds have altered an average of about one-sixth of the administration's recommendations; this year's commission may revise one-fourth.

On Wednesday, panel members decided to keep open the Red River Army Depot in Texas, a facility the Pentagon wanted to close, and to close the Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine, which the Pentagon had planned to keep open with reduced staffing. And they gave Virginia a year to pass laws to halt growth around the Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach or lose the base.

Holding out the possibility that Oceana's work would be shifted to the now-closed Cecil Field in Jacksonville, Fla., Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who attended Wednesday's session, said: "The state and the city of Jacksonville are prepared to make a commitment that this is a viable long-term option. Cecil Field is the optimal master jet base."

There were political overtones to other decisions facing the commissioners. They approved a Pentagon recommendation to close Pascagoula Naval Station in Mississippi, long protected by politicians including Republican Sen. Trent Lott, who has clashed with the White House in recent years.

Also facing the panel this week is a decision on the fate of Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, which the Pentagon has recommended be shut. Freshman Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) had pledged to protect the base as a key plank in his campaign platform last year en route to unseating Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle.

Pentagon officials declined to comment on specific cuts, but said they expected the commission to make changes.

As the commission began voting at a suburban Washington hotel on the future of more than 800 military facilities around the country, a broad assortment of senators, governors, mayors and lobbyists paced the ballroom, awaiting word on the fate of bases in their states and towns.

Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera Oberndorf sat expressionless, three local television cameras trained on her face, as panelists deplored encroaching development that threatened the viability of Oceana Naval Air Station.

"I'm relieved and happy that the base is not closed," she said afterward. "Obviously we have homework to do."

Phew! Commission saves Portsmouth Naval Shipyard

Associated Press (Boston Globe)

Beverly Wang

August 24, 2005

It's been the summer mantra: "Save Our Shipyard" was all over yellow T-shirts, bumper stickers and banners.

Shipyard workers, politicians, chamber of commerce officials and residents let out a big sigh of relief when they heard a national base closure commission voted to keep the shipyard open. It had been on the chopping block several times in the past. Since May, the community has been lobbying aggressively to keep the nation's oldest public shipyard open.

The commission's vote directly preserved at least 4,500 jobs. Chairman Anthony Principi said closing the yard would be a tragedy. He said Portsmouth is the nation's pre-eminent public shipyard, the "gold standard by which the country should measure shipyards."

People honked their horns and cheered.

"Yee-ha! That's what we've been waiting for," shouted Steve Walsh of Berwick, Maine, a

shipyard worker who was driving away for lunch. Workers had gathered at the shipyard's auditorium to watch the voting.

"This is a sweet victory," said Sen. Judd Gregg, R.-N.H. "We love it."

The Pentagon proposed closing the shipyard, arguing that there was too much capacity. Critics said there was not enough capacity to absorb the work at other facilities.

Commissioner Philip Coyle summed up his thoughts about excess capacity this way: "I don't use my garage 24 hours a day, but I'm not about to tear it down." The commission voted 7-1, with one abstention, in favor of keeping the base open.

In the afternoon, shipyard workers poured through the gates for a victory rally, bearing a yellow banner reading, "Thank You BRAC Commissioners."

"We were hoping for six, we were really hoping for five, and seven, seven, that tells (the Department of Defense) and Navy a big story -- they were wrong," said union president Paul O'Connor of the commissioners' votes.

Since 1800, the nearly 300-acre shipyard has sat along the New England coastline on an island in the Piscataqua River that separates the small town of Kittery from the tourist enclave of Portsmouth, N.H.

It has a civilian payroll of \$318.3 million. About 60 percent of the shipyard's workers come from Maine, and 40 percent come from New Hampshire.

The Pentagon said closing Portsmouth would have cost about 9,000 jobs, including thousands at businesses outside the shipyard gates. But Maine and New Hampshire said that estimate omitted the impact on New Hampshire. They argued 17,000 jobs could be lost across both states.

Another Maine base was not as lucky Wednesday. The commission voted to close the

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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Brunswick Naval Air Station, eliminating more than 4,000 jobs. It rejected the Pentagon's recommendation to scale back the base but keep it open because of its strategic location.

The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard escaped closure during the commission process in 1993 and 1995. Both times, the base was not on the original list from the Pentagon but was later added by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. Both times, the commission ultimately decided in favor of the base.

There have been other unsuccessful attempts to close the shipyard over the years.

The shipyard's storied maritime and military milestones fuel pride on both sides of the river. In 1917, it was the site of the first submarine built in a U.S. naval shipyard. During its prime in World War II, the shipyard's work force -- mostly civilians -- rose to more than 20,000 as submarines were built by the dozens.

In the 1970s, the base turned to repairing, refueling and overhauling nuclear-powered attack submarines. The Navy has scaled back that fleet from a Cold War peak of 98 to 54 today -- and it is continuing to shrink

Reaction to Portsmouth Shipyard vote

Associated Press (Boston Globe)

August 24, 2005

"Yee-ha! That's what we've been waiting for!" -- shipyard worker Steve Walsh of Berwick, Maine.

"This is a sweet victory. We love it." -- Sen. Judd Gregg, R.-N.H.

"It certainly is a well-deserved victory and frankly it's a validation of the exceptional performance of the men and women at Portsmouth. This day certainly belongs to them ... because it was there standard of excellence that ultimately prevailed. -- Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine.

"I'm so proud of the work force at Kittery. Clearly it's the men and women of Portsmouth

Naval Shipyard that convinced the commission that we would lose an irreplaceable national treasure if the yard were closed." -- Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine.

"We are all so grateful for the hard work of the Save Our Shipyard effort, to the individuals and delegations who have lobbied, rallied, written letters and signed petitions on behalf of the shipyard." -- Portsmouth, N.H., Mayor Evelyn Sirrell.

"This is the right decision: It's right for America, it's right for New Hampshire and it's right for our nation's security." -- Rep. Charles Bass, R-N.H.

"The yellow T-shirt is a symbol of the emotion and support the community put behind us everyday. Down in Boston (at the BRAC hearing) to turn behind us in that crowd to see that room packed, filled to overflowing with supporters, it meant a lot because you have to go into an argument, a debate, a fight like this with every bit of energy you have," Sen. John Sununu, R-N.H.

"The credit for today's vote belongs to the workers at the Shipyard. Their proven record of skilled workmanship, efficiency and dedication was our best and most persuasive argument," New Hampshire Gov. John Lynch.

"As the Maine and New Hampshire congressional delegations have stated time and time again, Portsmouth has set the standard for other shipyards in efficiency, cost savings and labor-management relations. The shipyard workers' commitment to excellence, coupled with the steadfast support of the local community, has made Portsmouth a yard that the commission has clearly recognized as the best in the country." -- Rep. Jeb Bradley, R-N.H.

Commission votes to close Brunswick Naval Air Station

Associated Press (Boston Globe)

Clarke Canfield

August 24, 2005

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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Defying the Pentagon, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted Wednesday to eliminate the last active duty airfield in New England -- the Brunswick Naval Air Station. The decision stunned supporters of the base.

Critics said the decision leaves the Northeast without a key strategic asset in homeland defense. The base provides a staging ground in the Northeast with its P-3 Orion aircraft that provide surveillance of North Atlantic shipping lanes.

"I don't believe that any amount of cost savings can justify leaving an entire quadrant of the nation defenseless," said Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine.

Supporters could hardly believe that the commission voted 7-2 to overrule the Pentagon, which made it clear that it did not want to close base.

The Navy envisioned a scaled-back base to support future requirements for homeland defense, as well as providing "surge capacity." The Pentagon also envisioned a continued role in NATO exercises and hosting a Navy survival school.

The Navy continued to view Brunswick as "the optimal site in New England" for P-3 detachment missions, a Navy official wrote last month.

But when it came time to vote, commissioners said scaling back the base would have resulted in job losses while preventing local and state officials from redeveloping the 3,200-acre site, which is considered ripe for redevelopment.

Commissioner Harold Gehman, a retired Navy admiral who did not visit the Brunswick the base, said New England has other Air Guard and reserve bases that could be used to accommodate surveillance aircraft if needed in the future.

But commissioner Philip Coyle, one of two commissioners to vote against closing the base, pointed out that Brunswick had both strategic

location and the ability to host the successor to the P-3 without new construction.

In Brunswick, there were some tears as people watched on a big-screen television as the base closing commission voted 7-2 to close the base. The closing would take place over three to six years, state officials said.

Seventy-five miles away, motorists honked their horns in celebration after the commission voted to keep open the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, a move that saves at least 4,500 jobs.

A vote on a third Maine facility, the Defense Finance Accounting Service center in Limestone, was expected on Thursday.

The commission will forward its recommendations to President Bush, who will have until Sept. 23 to accept or reject the list in its entirety.

After the vote, Gov. John Baldacci announced the creation of a cabinet-level Office of Redevelopment and Re-employment, which would coordinate state and federal resources to assist communities affected by the closure.

Baldacci and town councilors from Brunswick and Topsham signed a memorandum of agreement to work together to develop the site.

"We're going to stand together and support each other to make sure that tomorrow is better than today," Baldacci said

Brunswick Naval Air Station was commissioned in 1943 and employs about 4,800 military, civilian and reserve personnel, according to base officials. A task force that fought to keep the base open said the installation has an annual payroll of \$128 million and puts more than \$300 million into the local economy.

The Navy has spent more than \$100 million on the base over the past four years, building 126 housing units, a 500-bed barracks, a new control tower and a six-bay hangar, as well as resurfacing the runways and making infrastructure improvements.

There had been a debate within the Pentagon on whether or not to keep the base. The Pentagon ultimately decided that the base should not be closed because its location and capabilities give it an important role in homeland security.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said that the waffling over the base's strategic importance may have sent mixed messages to the base closing commission.

"Brunswick does have enormous strategic value. But that flip-flop sowed the seeds of doubt in the minds of the commissioners," she said.

Reaction to Brunswick Naval Air Station vote

Associated Press (Boston Globe)
August 24, 2005

Naval Air Station Brunswick is a jewel that cannot be replaced."

--Rick Tetrev, former second-in-command at base between 1992 and 1996 and leader of the task force that tried to save the base

"The commission's conclusions fundamentally fail to reconcile with the facts -- that Brunswick provides this nation with irreplaceable military value in our post-9-11 environment in which we also face new, emerging threats such as the potential for terrorists to use maritime shipping to smuggle weapons of mass destruction into our harbors and ports in the Northeast."

--Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine

"I don't believe that any amount of cost savings can justify leaving an entire quadrant of the nation defenseless."

--Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine

"I think it sent a confusing message to the commissioners that the Navy at one point endorsed the closure of the base and then argued that it had enormous strategic value. Of course ultimately the Navy and the Department of Defense got it right -- Brunswick does have

enormous strategic value. But that flip-flop sowed the seeds of doubt in the minds of the commissioners."

--Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine

"One area to explore for the community is some sort of arrangement with the military for some kind of future operational need on a regular basis... It's something we shouldn't give up on."

--Rep. Tom Allen, D-Maine

BRAC approves closing of Mass. reserve center

Associated Press (Boston Globe)
August 24, 2005

A federal commission's decision Wednesday to spare two other major military bases in New England has awakened hopes that Otis Air National Guard base on Cape Cod will also survive.

U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., said the Base Closing and Realignment Commission's vote to save the Navy's submarine base in Groton, Conn., and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine bodes well for Otis, the largest Massachusetts installation targeted for closure by the Pentagon.

"It shows that they're serious in their concerns that the Pentagon's recommendations leave the Northeast undefended," Kennedy said in a statement. "Otis plays a crucial role in defending the region, and I'm confident that they will take Otis off the list too."

Otis employs more than 500 people, the vast majority of them civilian workers. Its proponents argue that closing the base, whose fighter jets were the first to respond to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, would compromise air security in the Northeast.

The vote on Otis was expected later in the week.

Following months of base visits, public hearings and debate, the nine-member commission began voting Wednesday in Washington on whether to

accept or reject each of recommendations on the Pentagon list.

The panel quickly voted to close hundreds of Army reserve facilities nationwide.

The Westover Air Reserve Base in Chicopee, where about 175 Army reservists are currently stationed, is expected to gain another 1,000 reservists as the Army moves toward centralizing its reserve operations.

The 150 people who work at the Harry Malony Army Reserve Center in Devens, will likely be moved to another base. When they do, the facility will remain open to accommodate a new unit.

Hanscom Air Force Base in Bedford also stands to gain jobs and funding under the Pentagon's plan. Already one of the military's leading research and developments centers, Hanscom is slated for a \$131 million expansion to increase its research capabilities and add 1,100 jobs.

The base closing commission's vote on whether to accept or reject the Pentagon's plan for Hanscom was also expected later in the week.

The commission must send its final proposal to Bush by Sept. 8. Bush can accept it or reject it in its entirety. Congress also will have a chance to veto the plan, but has not taken that step in four previous rounds of closures.

Base benefits don't add up

Los Angeles Times
Catherine Lutz
August 25, 2005

NOW THAT the Base Realignment and Closure Commission has taken some military bases off the chopping block and left others on, President Bush must decide whether he agrees -- a decision Congress can override. The panel's job was to assess the Pentagon's argument that closing some of the military's 3,000 bases would strategically refocus national security and provide cost savings. Its decisions came after intense lobbying by community leaders,

congressional representatives and military experts.

In Washington and in places where base closings mean job losses -- such as Ventura, Calif., and Forest Park, Ga. -- the proceedings have been encased in flawed assumptions about what military bases do for and to surrounding communities. These flawed suppositions are symptomatic of the nation's failure to question and understand the military's role in our society.

A prevailing, but invalid, assumption is that a military base equals economic benefits. Well-funded military public relations offices pepper local newspapers with figures -- sometimes in the billions of dollars -- purporting to represent the money the Pentagon showers over regions with bases each year. But such figures are deceiving.

First, adding in soldiers' salaries, construction contracts and supply costs, the balance sheets neglect to point out how much of that money was first extracted from the community in taxes (the Pentagon now rakes in over half of all discretionary tax dollars, according to the Center for Defense Information). They also fail to calculate the cost in lost local property taxes, from which federal property is exempt. As a result, many base communities struggle with dramatically poorer schools and other inadequate services in comparison with neighboring cities. They also have more than their share of people needing social services, such as veterans dealing with injuries and military spouses suffering from domestic violence (at rates the Miles Foundation estimates are up to five times higher than the civilian population), and the third of female veterans who have been victims of rape or attempted rape.

Some costs are more invisible but often deadly: the environmental damage borne by military families and those beyond the fences. California continues to deal with the toxic legacy of its many closed bases, such as Ft. Ord, where heavy metals and explosives taint soil and water. Navy operations in the San Diego area have left a soup of battery acids, PCB-contaminated oil and other

pollutants. Even more egregious is the damage abroad, as in the Philippines, where children around the former Clark Air Force Base were born with deformities, which studies and a 1992 General Accounting Office report suggest were caused by military toxins. Who dares put a price on that?

Further, the economic impact figures do not reveal whose pockets the Pentagon dollars flow into and out of. Jobs on bases are increasingly low paying because government jobs with good benefits and pay were cut with privatization. Most jobs created near military bases are in retail, the lowest-paid category of work in the United States today. Instead of flowing to large numbers of local workers, most Pentagon tax dollars land in the hands of a few military contractors and local business owners.

In much the same way that the Pentagon has misrepresented the benefits of bases, it's also misrepresented the benefits of closing the bases. The commission has said that the Pentagon radically underestimated the costs of environmental cleanup and conversion of base land to local control.

Worse, the money theoretically will just be invested in another billion-dollar contract with companies such as Halliburton and General Electric, under the guise of cost savings through privatizing of military services. Why are we shifting money from one leaky pot to another? Will this plan make any of us safer? Can we ask instead: What else should we be doing with this treasure to improve the quality of human life?

Commission votes to close five major Army bases

Associated Press
Liz Sidoti
August 24, 2005

Commissioners weighing the Pentagon's plan to restructure hundreds of U.S. military bases spared a large Army depot in Texas but agreed with proposals to shut down five other major bases elsewhere.

The nine-member panel chose to shrink, rather than close, the Red River Army Depot in Texas, which repairs Humvees and Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

But, as it began final voting Wednesday with lightning speed, the panel sided with the Pentagon in closing Fort Gillem and Fort McPherson in Georgia, Fort Monroe in Virginia, Army Garrison Selfridge in Michigan and Fort Monmouth in New Jersey.

The panel also signed off on closing nearly 400 Army Reserve and National Guard facilities in dozens of states, creating instead new joint centers.

Most of the Army's proposal was approved in minutes and as a package. After finishing with the Army, the commission moved on to the fate of Navy bases.

Commissioners had said changes to the Pentagon's proposal were likely before they send their final report next month to President Bush, who could make his own changes. Congress also will get the chance to approve a joint resolution rejecting the plan after Bush considers it. Lawmakers haven't done that in previous rounds.

Before voting started, Chairman Anthony Principi said reviewing the proposal to close or shrink hundreds of bases set a daunting and unprecedented challenge for commissioners.

"The commission went to extraordinary lengths to ensure the soundness, correctness and integrity of the base realignment and closure process and to fulfill our commitment to transparency, honesty and fairness for all," said Principi, a former Veterans Affairs secretary.

He said the task was especially difficult because Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's proposal included more than double the recommendations in the four previous rounds of base closings combined.

Opening at least three days of final deliberations on which bases to spare and which to scrap,

Principi said the commission recognizes that closing bases is necessary to save money and transform the military to meet new challenges.

"At the same time, we know that the decisions we reach will have a profound impact on the communities hosting our military installations, and more importantly, on the people who bring those communities to life," he said.

Previous commissions - in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995 - altered about 15 percent of what the Pentagon proposed as it sought to get rid of bases considered no longer needed. But analysts say the current environment - including the emphasis on homeland security since Sept. 11, 2001 - make it difficult to predict just what the commission will change.

"It's not about just trying to get rid of excess capacity. It's actually about trying to reorganize the forces for future challenges," said Loren Thompson, a military analyst with the Lexington Institute, a think tank in Arlington, Va.

On Tuesday, Rumsfeld was optimistic his plan would remain largely intact. "I feel that we made very solid recommendations," he said. "I suspect the commission, when all is said and done, will endorse the overwhelming majority of those recommendations."

The Pentagon proposed closing or consolidating a record 62 major military bases and 775 smaller installations to save \$48.8 billion over 20 years, streamline the services and reposition the armed forces to face current threats. It's the first such effort in a decade to reconfigure domestic military bases and the most ambitious by far.

Announced in May, the proposal set off intense lobbying by communities fearful that the closures and downsizings would hurt their economies and by politicians worried they would be blamed by voters for job losses.

In the months since, commissioners reviewing the plan have voiced serious concerns about several parts of it, including the Pentagon's estimate of how much money will be saved.

The most contentious issues have been the Air Force's proposal to strip aircraft from about two dozen Air National Guard facilities and the Navy's efforts to scale back its forces in New England.

Commissioners fear those proposals could hamper homeland security, a contention the Pentagon rejects.

The Air Force's attempt to close Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, home to freshman Republican Sen. John Thune, has stirred the most political consternation. Thune argued during the 2004 campaign that he - not Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle - would be in a better position to save the facility.

The panel must send its final proposal to Bush by Sept. 8. The president can accept the report or order the commission to make changes.

Local News Articles

Deal Gives Oceana Last Chance

Norfolk Virginian Pilot
Dale Eisman and Louis Hansen
August 25, 2005

A federal base-closing commission delivered an expensive and unprecedented ultimatum to Virginia on Wednesday, threatening to shut Oceana Naval Air Station unless the state and local cities buy and eliminate homes, shopping centers and other development around the base.

The Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission also demanded strict controls on development in Virginia Beach and Chesapeake and a commitment of at least \$15 million annually to buy land in high risk areas. An estimated 1,800 homes, assessed at about \$268 million, are in crash zones near Oceana.

The commission gave the state and cities until the end of March to meet its terms or face immediate loss of the base to Florida. And even if its conditions are met, the commission said, the Pentagon ultimately should phase out Oceana.

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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“We want to ensure that we hold this community’s feet to the fire,” said retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Lloyd Newton, one of seven commissioners supporting the move.

Commissioners accused state and local leaders of ignoring the risks of building homes, shops and schools around the Navy’s busiest air base.

Stunned state and local officials said they must now decide whether spending millions to keep the jet fighter base is worth it, especially since its days might be numbered.

Commissioners directed the Pentagon to conduct “a rapid, complete, due diligence review” of Florida’s offer to shift Oceana’s planes, pilots and crews to Cecil Field, a former Navy base near Jacksonville.

“It is also the sense of the commission that the future of naval aviation is not Naval Air Station Oceana,” said commission Chairman Anthony J. Principi.

The Oceana vote was the most grievous in a series of wounds delivered to Virginia and Hampton Roads in particular as the commission began an expected three days of votes on its final recommendations. The panel also decided Wednesday – unanimously – to recommend closing Hampton’s Fort Monroe and voted 7-1 to preserve a pair of New England bases whose operations had been slated for transfer to the area.

The commission’s decisions could mean a loss of about 12,000 jobs at Oceana and 1,500 at Fort Monroe. And by saving the submarine base in Connecticut and a shipyard in Maine, the panel kept more than 6,000 new jobs from migrating to Hampton Roads.

The Oceana ultimatum left Virginia and Florida elected leaders in limbo.

U.S. Sen. John W. Warner, R-Va., an author of the original BRAC law, suggested that the commission had overstepped its bounds.

“I don’t wish to sit here and threaten court action,” Warner said, but legal action may be

Virginia’s only recourse. “I feel very strongly that some of these actions were never envisioned by those of us who put this law together.”

Gov. Mark R. Warner sounded more conciliatory, telling reporters the state will “step up and meet the challenge that the BRAC Commission laid out in terms of reducing encroachment.”

The governor said a budget plan he’ll submit to lawmakers in December will include money to help Virginia Beach meet the BRAC demands. He declined to say how much he would commit.

Warner’s term, however, will end before any Oceana legislation is considered. The two major-party candidates in the Nov. 8 gubernatorial election issued statements Wednesday saying they would support legislation necessary to preserve the base. Spokespeople for Democrat Timothy M. Kaine and Republican Jerry W. Kilgore said they would not rule out signing measures to condemn property around Oceana.

Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera Oberndorf, who attended Wednesday’s proceedings in a Crystal City hotel, sat in the rear of the commission’s meeting room, several rows behind Florida Gov. Jeb Bush. After the vote, she retreated to a hotel kitchen and huddled with advisers before commenting.

Oberndorf predicted that city and state officials will look for ways to meet the commission’s demands. But they’ll also consider whether it makes sense to invest in saving a base that the commission believes ultimately should be closed, she said.

“It’s up to us now to do the research and decide what would be in the best interest of our citizens,” she said.

Gov. Bush said Florida is ready to prepare Cecil Field to get the Oceana jets. He acknowledged that the state’s plans – which include spending \$200 million to clear tenants now on the property, accelerating construction of a \$130 million highway to the base and building a public-private housing venture for military

families – would be more difficult without the certainty that the base would receive the more than 200 fighters.

But, he said, the Florida delegation made its point to the commission that Cecil Field “is a viable, long-term option.”

Added Florida Congressman Cliff Stearns: “Oceana is on a short fuse.”

The commission laid out a series of requirements to elected leaders in Virginia and the cities of Virginia Beach and Chesapeake:

- Enact state laws restricting development in the noise and crash zones in the two cities;

- Pass state and local laws establishing a program to condemn and purchase all property located within the most dangerous crash zones, as depicted in a 1999 Navy study, around Oceana;

- Identify under developed land in high noise areas and limit new construction to projects compatible with the base, restricting new home construction;

- Establish programs to buy development rights of landowners in the undeveloped corridor between Oceana and Fentress field, an auxiliary landing strip in Chesapeake;

- Finalize a joint land use study conducted by the region with the Navy.

At the same time, commissioners told Florida officials to ready Cecil Field, a former Navy jet base closed in 1999 and that is now a mostly empty industrial park.

The commission asked Florida to set aside money to relocate commercial tenants, build new Navy housing and be ready to turn over the property by December 2006.

Commissioners ready to scuttle Oceana unsparingly recited its flaws during the 20-minute discussion.

James T. Hill, a retired Army general from Texas, said pilots approaching or leaving Oceana flew over homes, churches and schools. He warned one day a strike fighter would crash into Lynnhaven Mall, creating unspeakable disaster.

“It is a safety issue, not a noise issue,” he said. “We’ve got to do something about that.”

Principi said in an interview the commission did not intend to make the conditions impossible. They wanted to give the cities and state an opportunity to correct their mistakes, he said.

They also wanted the Navy to have other options for another jet base.

“We did not want to tie the Navy’s hands,” he said.

Samuel K. Skinner said the commission was lucky to find the Florida base, which has received \$130 million in upgrades since military operations ceased.

Development around Oceana has choked off its future as a home to jet fighters, Skinner said.

“If this airport were a civilian airport, it would not be approved and would not be operating today,” he asserted. But, he added, “we owe one last chance to the people of Virginia to get their act together.” The commission’s plan provides an opportunity, “to clean up the mess they have created,” he said.

Independent analysts, meanwhile, said the unconventional nature of the commission plan also may provide Virginians an opportunity to fight it in court.

“It’s the most bizarre recommendation in BRAC history,” said Jeremiah J. Gertler, a 1995 BRAC Commission staffer now working at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

No previous commission has tried to force state and local governments to take actions to protect

a base, much less set a specific dollar figure for those governments to invest, he said.

Christopher Hellman, who tracks BRAC issues at the Washington-based Center for Arms Control, said a Virginia court challenge to the plan is a real possibility.

But the commission has a team of lawyers who've researched the base closing law, he cautioned, and "I suspect they probably do have this authority."

Lawyers specializing in property law also aren't sure whether all of BRAC's demands can be legally met.

Don Clark, a Virginia Beach lawyer with Williams Mullen, said condemning and buying property in an accident zone to protect residents from potential crashes probably falls within the bounds of existing law. But enacting new zoning laws to comply with Navy compatibility guidelines might be "a bit more dicey," he said.

"What you're talking about there, assuming these properties are already zoned for development, is a regulatory taking of land, or an inverse condemnation of development rights," Clark said. "If that's permitted, then you have to compensate people for the development rights you'd be taking away."

Virginia Beach City Attorney Leslie L. Lilley said he had no opinion yet on the legality of BRAC's demands.

Wednesday's votes capped a frantic four months of lobbying by state and local officials, and in many cases their well-paid lobbyists, directed at saving more than three-dozen bases targeted for closure to save money.

The nine-member commission signaled early that it was reluctant to shut the sub base in Connecticut and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, moves that would all but have ended the Navy's presence in the northeast while shifting thousands of jobs to Hampton Roads.

More recently, commissioners questioned the sea service's decision to retain Oceana as its East Coast fighter jet hub. The base, which is home to more than 200 F-14 Tomcats and F/A-18 Hornets and Super Hornets, had been considered safe after the Defense Department declined in May to recommend that it be closed.

Now, the pressure is on and the stakes are high.

"The city and the state kind of have a gun to their head right now..." said state Sen. Ken Stolle. "If we don't do this, Oceana leaves. If we do this, Oceana maybe stays."

Conn. residents thrilled panel didn't torpedo sub base

Norwich Bulletin (Connecticut)

Jason Tsai

August 24, 2005

Businessman Dave Miller got the good news that the nation's oldest submarine base had been spared from closing when a customer burst in Wednesday and started dancing a jig.

"I thought to myself, 'What is this woman doing?'" said Miller, who runs Milprin Print Service in Scheetz Plaza, about a mile from the base. "But then she started saying, 'Your business is saved. Your business is saved.'"

Dave mimicked the woman by shimmying and stabbing his fingers in the air.

"It was a great feeling at the time," he said.

"About 80% of my business is those guys on the base — you know, sewing on nameplates and patches — so this is great news, of course."

News traveled fast at Scheetz Plaza. Phones rang incessantly and store owners bolted into each other's businesses to discuss the Base Closure and Realignment commission's decision to take the base off the Pentagon's closure list.

Submarine Base New London is a critical part of southeastern Connecticut's economy and has been since the 1860s. The base provides a livelihood for 10,000, employing 1,000 full-time civilians and 1,500 contractors in addition to 7,500 Navy personnel.

Miller burst into the Nautilus Barber Shop, a few doors down, and exclaimed to owner Joseph Quaratella, "We're saved, Joe." They grabbed each other by the shoulders and shook each other vigorously. Retired 1st Class Petty Officer Salvatore D'Angelo, in the barber's chair, waited patiently and smiled.

"We dodged the bullet this time," Quaratella said. "I honestly thought we were going to lose the base. But evidently we beat them good."

The barbershop has been a Groton staple for 46 years. Quaratella's wood-paneled shop is covered — floor to ceiling and wall to wall — with framed submarine and battleship photographs. Quaratella said a handful of Navy retirees visited him in past weeks, resigned to the belief the sub base was going to close.

"They came in here, basically as a last goodbye. It was kind of sad, actually," Quaratella said. "They were so convinced they were going to have to leave because without the base, they wouldn't have the commissary and all the other benefits."

But Tanya Stonick, 28, was much more optimistic. The laundry attendant at Mom's Washtub Laundromat — next to the barbershop — said she knew all along that the sub base would be saved. Still, she yelped when she learned the news from a small television next door in Pop's Kitchen.

"I didn't think I'd feel all that nervous, because I've been pretty confident that the base would stay open. But, honestly, it was pretty nerve-racking in the moments right before they decided," Stonick said. "But now, what's to worry about?"

**Cannon's Future on the Line;
Base-Closure Panel Votes This Week**
Albuquerque Journal
Miguel Navrot
August 24, 2005

This week, the residents of Clovis will learn if one of the most prominent fixtures near the high plains town will be closing.

Cannon Air Force Base, with a military history dating to World War II, would close under the Pentagon's plan for base closings. A panel of retired military officers and lawmakers reviewing the proposal is expected to vote during a four-day meeting beginning today if Cannon should close and take with it some 2,600 military jobs.

Since mid-May, a coalition of community leaders, New Mexico officials and the state delegation in Washington has beseeched the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to reverse the Pentagon. Five of the nine panelists must agree to remove Cannon from the hit list for the base to survive.

Under Air Force closure plans, Cannon will close in 2011 for a savings of about \$2.7 billion over 20 years. A final OK must come from the White House and Congress.

Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said in an interview he believes Cannon will remain open. Commission members, Domenici said, are concerned with the potentially "enormous economic damage" predicted with Cannon's closing.

Air Force estimates show that closing the base would take roughly 2,800 jobs from the area. State officials say Cannon is responsible each year for roughly \$200 million - or one third - of the Clovis economy.

"Secondly," Domenici said of meetings with commissioners, "I've found that they have a rather major interest in talking about what might be put at Cannon."

Cannon is home to three F-16 Falcon fighter jet squadrons. Commissioners have raised the possibility of the base housing one of the next-generation jets, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

The F-35 is still under development but would likely succeed the Air Force's F-16. Military

planners have looked at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida as the new jet's training center.

Domenici noted the Pentagon - not the closure commission - will decide where to locate F-35 training. But the possibility of finding a new or continued use for Cannon, Domenici said, may be enough for the commission to keep it operating.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., said he doesn't know how the commission will vote but said the F-35 questions are a "hopeful sign."

"I think that clearly would strengthen the case for keeping Cannon open, and I hope the commission sees it that way," Bingaman said. "... I don't think it (the F-35) would have to be the sole mission of Cannon, but I think it's an appropriate mission."

In a Friday statement, Gov. Bill Richardson said Cannon has a 50-50 chance of staying open. Richardson and state officials also have proposed having Cannon used for joint training with Army soldiers at two Texas posts, Fort Bliss and Fort Hood.

Cannon is one of 33 major bases selected for closure in this round of closures, but Clovis could suffer the hardest economic hit of any other military town that may lose its local

Panel votes to close Fort Monmouth, but leaves window open

Associated Press
Donna de La Cruz
August 24, 2004

Fort Monmouth will close and send thousands of its jobs to a base in Maryland, a federal panel decided Wednesday, dealing a blow to communities in the central New Jersey region the Army post has called home for decades.

But the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's decision - during a day that saw several other major Army and Navy bases around the country ordered closed, and a few spared - did come with a caveat that could keep

Fort Monmouth's doors open beyond the normal, six-year deadline for shuttering bases.

The commission said the fort's work on equipment that helps soldiers communicate is too vital to disrupt by closing the base too soon. Several officials said Congress would oversee any Army plan to close the base to ensure such a move would adhere to the panel's restriction.

Some New Jersey politicians saw the condition as a shot at keeping the post open while others were resigned the facility will be disbanded as the Pentagon seeks to cut costs.

Democratic Reps. Rush Holt and Frank Pallone, who spearheaded the state's effort to keep the post open, described the commission's action as a small window of opportunity.

Holt said the federal panel was "trying to close the window on Fort Monmouth but left it open a crack."

"We will see that the Pentagon is really held to this condition," Holt said. "We will see that the important work at Fort Monmouth continues."

The commission voted 7-1 to accept the Pentagon's recommendation to close the post but, with the condition, it was unclear how quickly Fort Monmouth's research and development facilities would move to the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. The shift is expected to relocate more than 4,000 jobs - half of them highly, specialized science and engineering positions - out of the post's total of 5,200, mostly civilian jobs. Fort Monmouth's other facilities, such as the West Point Preparatory School, are to be reassigned to other installations.

Commissioner Philip Coyle, who spoke passionately for keeping Fort Monmouth open, later said he reluctantly voted to close the post with the added condition because he felt it was "a way to protect workers at Fort Monmouth as long as possible."

The motion, introduced by Commissioner Samuel Skinner, included language that said the

secretary of Defense may only move the jobs to Maryland "after putting in place safeguards that will ensure that no ongoing program will be moved until redundant capability is established, or other mitigating factors are in place to ensure that no degradation of the program or its support to the global war on terror or any other military contingency operation will occur as a result of the movement of the program."

"Furthermore, the secretary must also put in place programs to maximize the retention of critical workforce personnel before, during and after any such move," the motion stated.

Coyle, Holt and Pallone said it was their understanding that Congress would have oversight to make sure the secretary of Defense met the condition before Fort Monmouth could be closed, although no overseeing body was included in the motion's language. Coyle said the motion could keep Fort Monmouth open past the six-year deadline the Pentagon has to close a facility.

But military analyst Loren Thompson said any delay would be minimal, saying that the secretary of Defense would surely certify that moving Fort Monmouth's research and development mission would not disrupt the war on terror.

The key components being worked on at Fort Monmouth that could keep it open longer than other bases is known as "C4ISR," a program made up of command, control, communications, computers, intelligence and reconnaissance components that help soldiers in the field communicate with commanders.

Republican Rep. Chris Smith said he wished the motion's language had been stronger.

"It's not the ironclad language you would want in your mortgage contract," Smith lamented.

Acting Gov. Richard Codey vowed to hold the Pentagon to its word that mothballing Fort Monmouth must not jeopardize the war on terror.

"We intend to hold the Department of Defense accountable for that. This is an opportunity New Jersey must take to make our case to Congress," Codey said. "We plan to work with leaders from both parties, as well as our congressional delegation, to fight this decision in Congress and prove that Fort Monmouth does indeed serve a critical role in the protection of our troops."

While some politicians vowed to continue fighting to keep Fort Monmouth open, others were more resigned. Eatontown Mayor Gerald Tarantolo, who attended the hearing, said the window may be open a bit, "but it's gradually shutting."

"It's time for local communities to have a plan B," he said.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has proposed shutting or consolidating 62 major U.S. military bases and hundreds of smaller facilities, saying his plan will save \$49 billion over 20 years.

Closing Fort Monmouth, established in 1917, would save the Pentagon \$143 million in cost of living and health expenses, but New Jersey officials argued it would cost \$822 million to shift the fort's work to Aberdeen. They also stressed that nearly 80 percent of Fort Monmouth's employees would not relocate to Aberdeen, creating a so-called "brain drain" of highly skilled engineers and scientists.

But Pentagon officials said that consolidating the work being done at Fort Monmouth and other Army research and development operations in Maryland made more sense, instead of having work scattered at bases in various states.

Panel Vote Would Bring Over 7,000 Jobs To Md.

Baltimore Sun
Phillip McGowan
August 25, 2005

Base closing, realignment boosts Fort Meade, Aberdeen Proving Ground; State could end up with largest net gain in jobs

A federal commission approved yesterday Pentagon plans that would bring thousands of high-paying jobs to Maryland, but displayed an independent streak by sparing two historic New England military installations slated for closure under the national realignment proposal.

Aberdeen Proving Ground would gain more than 2,200 jobs after the Base Closure and Realignment Commission approved the closing of Fort Monmouth in New Jersey.

The panel also approved moving media and defense information operations to Fort Meade, a group that makes up the bulk of the more than 5,300 jobs that the Pentagon had recommended to go to the Army post in Anne Arundel County.

Under the Pentagon's original proposals, the 6,600 jobs Maryland would have gained overall had been second only to Georgia's 7,400. But with the panel's surprise decision to preserve a submarine base in Connecticut rather than transfer many of its duties to Georgia, Maryland could end up with the largest net gain in jobs.

"We've had a state-level strategy to make Maryland one of the best knowledge- and technology-driven economies in the country," said Aris Melissaratos, Maryland's secretary of business and economic development. "It's a huge boost for Maryland's economy, a huge vote of confidence."

Anne Arundel County Executive Janet S. Owens said she was "delighted" as she watched the commission votes on television.

"So many people have worked so hard for such a long time on this," she said. "There has really been concerted, focused and bipartisan support for this."

Fort Meade employs about 40,000 workers. In addition to job gains expected through the base realignment process, county and state officials anticipate significant growth at the National

Security Agency. The super-secret spy agency, based at Fort Meade, is expanding its antiterrorism operations, and state officials say that could result in up to 5,000 more workers there over the next decade.

While the votes were expected, the nine-member commission pulled several surprises on the first of four days of hearings in which it began to formally revise the Pentagon's recommendations for closing or realigning 62 major bases and closing more than 800 other facilities across the country.

The moves would save nearly \$50 billion over 20 years, according to the Pentagon. But a recent report by the Government Accountability Office put the savings at about half that.

The commission - known as the BRAC - must send its final list to President Bush by Sept. 8. He then must approve the list in its entirety or send it back for revision by Sept. 23. Congress then has 45 days to accept or reject the entire list, but it, too, cannot make any changes. Historically, the president and Congress have not altered such recommendations.

The panel voted against Pentagon proposals to close the Portsmouth Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, and Submarine Base New London in Connecticut - two of the Navy's oldest facilities that are considered part of the economic lifeblood of New England.

"If we close New London down, we will never get it back," said commission Chairman Anthony J. Principi. "I think it would be a tragic mistake, a tragic loss for this nation."

But the commission decided to shut Naval Air Station Brunswick in Maine, rather than heed the recommendation to reduce its size.

Despite the gains at APG and Fort Meade, it was not all good news for Maryland yesterday. The panel voted to move the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, and its nearly 3,000 jobs, from Bethesda to Fort Belvoir, Va.

And at Aberdeen, the expected arrival of 5,000 scientists and engineers would be tempered by the closing of APG's Ordnance School and other facilities, resulting in a loss of 3,500 jobs.

State officials, however, noted that many of the jobs coming to Maryland would be much higher-paying than those leaving.

"Harford County is becoming a major story in the high-tech industry, and there is no end in sight," said Anirban Basu, chief executive of Sage Policy Group, an economic and policy consulting firm in Baltimore.

BRAC members did not address the news media yesterday, declining to comment until after further proposals are addressed today, including whether to move Walter Reed Army Medical Center and its nearly 2,000 workers from Washington to the naval hospital facility in Bethesda.

Principi said the panel probably would address the restructuring of the Air National Guard this afternoon. Pentagon proposals would reduce Air Guard strength across the nation, including Maryland, and governors of the affected states have questioned the constitutionality of that decision.

The BRAC's decision to close Fort Monmouth ends a contentious debate between political leaders in Maryland and New Jersey. Maryland officials have said that consolidating vital technology research at Aberdeen would serve the country's defense interests and save the Pentagon millions of dollars.

New Jersey counterparts said the Pentagon's recommendations were too costly and would lead to a "brain drain" - workers not transferring with their jobs - that would endanger U.S. troops in the Middle East. They said the country could not afford to hinder efforts of Fort Monmouth scientists to develop measures to protect troops from roadside bombs and heat-seeking missiles.

"It's depressing," said Bob Crisso, 63, of Caldwell, N.J., who works for a private defense contractor at Fort Monmouth. "It kind of takes

the steam out of everything. I'd planned on working until my health wouldn't allow me to, but now I'll retire early. I'm not about to pick up and move."

Commission members expressed reservations about cost overruns of moving operations to Aberdeen, but they deferred to the Army, which considered the closing of Fort Monmouth a priority.

"This was not a battle between New Jersey and Maryland," said Rep. C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger, a Democrat who represents APG and Fort Meade. "This is about what's good for our country and our war fighters."

But an amendment could enable Fort Monmouth to close later than the six years prescribed to relocate. The commission mandated that the installation could not be closed if doing so would hinder war operations in the Middle East.

Reps. Rush D. Holt and Frank Pallone Jr., New Jersey Democrats, said they see an opening to continue to fight for Fort Monmouth.

Pallone called the amendment a "compromise that doesn't make sense. But it gives up the opening to keep up the fight" through Congress.

Vote Leaves Many Scratching Their Heads (New Jersey)

Newark Star-Ledger
August 25, 2005

In the end, the federal panel charged with reorganizing the nation's military bases agreed that the work done at Fort Monmouth is vital to protecting troops in Iraq and ensuring the technical prowess of the Army. But it decided that work can be transferred to a base in Maryland without missing a beat.

The retired generals, former congressmen and ex-Cabinet members who make up the Base Realignment and Closure Commission clearly had reservations about the move.

They said Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's proposal to transfer Fort Monmouth's

Communications and Electronics Command "substantially deviated" from the Pentagon's own base-closure criteria. They said it overlooked elements of the 1,126-acre base's "military value." They said the true cost of closing the fort will most certainly be higher than the \$822 million Pentagon estimate.

Yet the commissioners voted 7-1 to close Fort Monmouth and consolidate communications and electronics research now done in New Jersey, Kentucky and Alabama at the 70,000-acre Aberdeen Proving Ground.

"This is about the future, which calls for consolidation, modernized infrastructure and the room to grow," Commissioner James Hill, a retired Army general said.

The decision left New Jersey officials perplexed, angry and uncertain about what to do next.

"This was like going before a judge who agrees with every one of your arguments and rules against you anyway," said S. Thomas Gagliano, a member of a state commission formed to protect New Jersey's bases. "We gave them all the information they wanted. They agreed with everything we said. Then they voted against us anyway."

The commissioners said they recognized the key role Fort Monmouth's nearly 2,000 scientists and engineers play in upgrading devices that protect troops from roadside bombs in Iraq and Afghanistan. They also acknowledged the base's role in developing a futuristic warfare system that relies on unmanned aerial vehicles and ground sensors to help find and destroy the enemy.

They addressed both points by including an amendment to their decision that stipulated the Army can only move its operations to Maryland "after putting in place safeguards that no on-going program will be moved until redundant capacity is established."

Some Fort Monmouth advocates saw the added requirement as a narrow window for further

challenges of the closure order. Others saw it as a meaningless gesture.

Paul Gaffney, a retired vice admiral and chairman of New Jersey's base-protection panel, was the most upbeat, saying the provision would push back beginning of the transfer by a year or more.

"This gives Congress a chance to scrutinize this decision and scrub the data again," Gaffney said. "It could slow things down. A lot of things could happen over the next few years."

But even as members of New Jersey's congressional delegation vowed to use the added time to challenge the decision, they conceded it was unclear how they would proceed.

The commissioner's order gives the secretary of defense total discretion in deciding whether the guidelines for transferring operations from New Jersey to Maryland are followed.

"It looks like self-certification by the Army," said Rep. Christopher Smith (R-4th Dist.), who represents more than 800 fort employees. "You always want to see another set of eyes. ... I'd like to see the (Government Accountability Office) involved, but there's no provision for that."

To John Poitras, president of the union that represents 3,000 fort employees, it is a moot point. He expects many of Fort Monmouth's most experienced researchers to retire and most of its bright young stars to land new jobs before long before the move to Maryland even officially begins. Only about 10 percent of the members of his union, Local 1904 of the American Federation of Government Employees, have said they will move.

"As far as I'm concerned, they've already lost some of the Army's best people," Poitras said. "They miscalculated. They just went through the motions. And they've hurt the Army and they've hurt the soldiers."

Texas Close To Losing Ingleside Naval Base

Houston Chronicle

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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Michael Hedges and Samantha Levine
August 25, 2005

The military base closing commission Wednesday upheld a Pentagon decision to shutter the Naval Station Ingleside near Corpus Christi as the panel began three days of voting that will shape the fate of military communities across the United States.

"I will have to vote against Ingleside, but I can tell you up front it breaks my heart," said retired Army Gen. James Hill, one of nine Base Closure and Realignment Commission members, reflecting the strong emotions involved in deciding the future of a facility that its advocates called vital to the economy of South Texas and the defense of the Gulf Coast.

The commission upheld a Pentagon recommendation to move the Navy's Mine Warfare Training Center at Ingleside to San Diego, Calif., and downsize the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi.

The moves will cost the area 6,000 jobs, according to Defense Department estimates.

"I think the Department of Defense is not really adequately addressing homeland defense in the whole process," said Texas Republican Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, who attended the commission deliberations in Northern Virginia. She said the Ingleside closing left the Gulf Coast without a Naval facility from which to protect oil refineries and shipping lanes.

Texas won a victory with the vote to realign rather than close the Red River Army Depot near Texarkana. It will continue as a maintenance facility for Humvees and Bradley Fighting Vehicles, but some of its other functions will be moved elsewhere.

The nearby Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant will close.

The commission decided to keep a cryptologic support center at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, a move Texas officials hoped was a signal that a regional medical center and other

joint service facilities in the area could also be saved in voting today.

A decision on whether to remove fighter aircraft used by the Texas Air National Guard from Houston's Ellington Field was expected Friday.

The commission was charged with upholding or overturning a round of base closings that Pentagon officials said could save taxpayers \$49 billion over the next two decades.

Several long-standing military bases across the United States were shut down by the commission, decisions that local officials said would devastate economies and cultures that have grown dependent on the bases.

A few lucky communities won a reprieve from the panel.

New England was seen as the big winner after the first day of voting. The commissioners spared both a submarine base at New London, Conn., and the Portsmouth shipyard at Kittery, Maine.

"We know that the decisions we reach will have a profound impact on the communities hosting our military installations, and more importantly, on the people who bring those communities to life," commission chairman Anthony Principi said at the outset of the voting.

The vote on Ingleside produced one of the deepest divisions of the day, with the panel voting 5-2 with two abstentions.

"I really think the Navy is wrong on this one," said commissioner James Hansen, a former congressman from Utah.

Former Corpus Christi Mayor Loyd Neal, who chaired a task force trying to save the Ingleside facilities, said, "This is a big blow to South Texas. I've had better days."

Rep. Solomon Ortiz, D-Corpus Christi, said he knew Ingleside was facing closure, but said, "You are hopeful and praying that there will be

heavenly intervention, and that they will change their votes."

Those struggling to save facilities used the argument that after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington, many military bases that otherwise might be expendable were now crucial to regional homeland security.

The homeland security argument has also been used in a campaign to keep 15 F-16 fighter jets at Ellington as part of the Texas Air National Guard's 147th Fighter Wing.

Intense efforts by House Majority Leader Tom Delay, R-Sugar Land, and others have focused on the argument that the fighters are critical to providing protection for refineries and energy plants in the Houston area.

President Bush has already said he would not overturn the commission's decisions, which he will receive by Sept. 8. That would leave Congress as the only possible reprieve for the facilities axed by the commissioners.

Both houses of Congress would have to vote to overturn the entire base-closing process rather than simply restoring individual bases, something seen as highly unlikely. Otherwise, the commission's decisions would become law later this year.

It was the fifth round of base closings since 1988, when the military began to downsize with the end of the Cold War. During previous cycles, commissioners had resurrected about 15 percent of the Pentagon's targeted facilities. But after Wednesday's meeting, it appeared that a higher percentage of cuts would be restored in the current round.

The commission upheld a recommendation that an Army brigade that will be temporarily stationed at Fort Hood beginning next year would be permanently based at Fort Carson, Colo., because the Killeen base lacked the infrastructure to permanently support the unit.

Fort Hood will end up with five brigade-size units, the same number it has now, but not add a sixth sought by state officials.

Fort Bliss, meanwhile, will be a major winner, adding the brigades of the 1st Armored Division and other units that are relocating from Germany and Korea. Fort Bliss' Air Defense Artillery Center would be shifted to Fort Sill, Okla.

Closer To Closing

'Time to move on to the future,' Perdue says
Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Christopher Quinn
August 25, 2005

What little hope Georgia officials had of saving four endangered military bases all but vanished Wednesday.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted to recommend shutting Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Fort Gillem in Forest Park, the Naval Air Station Atlanta in Marietta and the Navy Supply Corps School in Athens.

The bases were on a list of installations the Pentagon recommended in May for closure or realignment.

The final decision rests with President Bush and Congress, but they are not expected to raise serious opposition to the independent commission's decisions.

Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue said the chances of persuading the president to reject the commission's recommendations were "minimal."

"I think we have to be realistic. We have fought a good fight, and it's time to move on to the future," Perdue said.

North Georgia stands to lose more than 9,700 military and civilian jobs and more than \$568 million in annual salaries, according to estimates by military officials.

Georgia still will experience a net gain of more than 4,000 jobs in this round of base closings because of about 9,800 additional military and

civilian positions being relocated to Fort Benning from other states and about 4,000 jobs that other facilities in Georgia will gain.

Perdue promised the state would help communities affected by base closings implement redevelopment plans. "Our goal is to have jobs that surpass the jobs we currently have," he said.

New purpose for facilities

At the same time, the closings will open up four large tracts of land in prime spots for redevelopment. Developers are already asking about the 488 acres at Fort McPherson, 1,427 acres at Fort Gillem, 166 acres at the Naval Air Station and 58 acres at the Navy Supply Corps School. Any jobs and tax revenue that come with new homes, commercial districts or industrial parks are years away.

"Knowing that getting off the list would be problematic, we began contingency planning that set up redevelopment authorities, and those are well along in the process," said retired Brig. Gen. Phil Browning, executive director of the Georgia Military Affairs Coordinating Committee.

Some officials still held out hope. Mayor Heidi Davison of Athens said she started to believe the Navy school there might survive after the city's work to prepare its case before the BRAC Commission at a regional hearing in Atlanta in June.

"I thought, We've done a good job, and maybe, just maybe . . ." she said.

Although Fort McPherson and the Navy Supply Corps School went down by unanimous votes and Fort Gillem lost out by a vote of 8-1, a last-minute proposal by one member of the commission to keep open Naval Air Station Atlanta brought moments of hope for some.

Shirley Payne, a civilian administrator who helps run nonmilitary operations at the facility, said employees logged onto the Defense

Department's Web site Wednesday morning to watch the commission's debate.

"We were very positive because we had everything going for us," she said. "We have excellent demographics. Why would we want to move those resources? We're not an expensive command to maintain."

Commissioner Harold W. Gehman Jr., a retired admiral, proposed keeping the Navy's fighter jets and consolidating them at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, with which the Naval Air Station shares runways, as a joint Air Force-Navy reserve unit.

But retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd W. Newton, another member of the commission, defended the Defense Department's plan to close the station, saying the bases to which the planes are being transferred were just as good.

The commission rejected Gehman's proposal 6-3.

The commission also unanimously agreed with Pentagon recommendations to close two small military operations in the state: the Army Reserve Center in Columbus and a Marine Reserve inspector-instructor facility in Rome.

Years until redevelopment

Browning, who helped lead Georgia's efforts to get the bases removed from the closure list, now will play a role in coordinating efforts to get the sites ready for development.

Getting a preliminary plan in place usually takes at least 18 months, he said.

Redevelopment can be a lengthy process. It usually takes the military up to two years to move out as operations are relocated to other bases. And after the military is gone, rebuilding can take even longer.

The former Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado is now a smart-growth town center filled with shops, restaurants and small, service-oriented businesses. It has 3,200 new houses, generates

\$39 million in additional local taxes and boasts 800 acres of parks and green space. But it took 11 years to reach that level.

Redevelopment authorities have been sounding out Atlanta area business and community leaders for ideas, Browning said. "We are kicking it into first gear right away."

Forest Park Mayor Chuck Hall said his office has fielded inquiries about Gillem from development companies.

"I have already had [a] number of business developers that have called and wanted to know what was going to happen," he said.

They have asked that their names be placed on a list to be considered, he said.

"I foresee a very vibrant industrial park and commercial space," Hall said.

Davison, the Athens mayor, said Piedmont College and Athens Tech have expressed interest in the campus of the Navy Supply Corps School.

'It will hurt big time'

But Georgians who are dependent on military personnel for business were less optimistic.

"This could be the thing that finally finishes us off," said L.C. Mathis Jr., owner of the Old South Restaurant near Fort Gillem.

For the last three decades, soldiers and civilians from the fort have been his main source of customers.

"We've already had to cut everything. Six years ago, we had 200 to 300 people come in for lunch and now maybe 50 to 100," Mathis said.

Anwar Kapadia, owner of the Exxon gas and convenience store at the entrance to Fort Gillem, agreed.

"We will have a loss," Kapadia said. "It will hurt big time."

He said he will try to hold on in hopes the base will redevelop, bringing new customers.

The BRAC Commission will continue its hearing in Arlington, Va., today and Friday, considering Air Force and other facilities. It must pass the list on to Bush by Sept. 8.

Bush is not allowed to change the list, but he could send it back to the commission with suggestions. In four previous rounds of closings, no president has failed to accept the commission's recommendations.

After the president approves the list, it goes to Congress, which has 45 working days to accept or reject it in full. The report becomes law if Congress does not act on it, which is usually the case.

2,600 New Jobs For Florida In Base Shuffle

Associated Press (Miami Herald)

Ron Ward

August 25, 2005

Jacksonville Naval Air Station will gain about 1,900 jobs with the arrival of five squadrons of P-3 Orion patrol planes.

Florida is gaining about 2,600 jobs, new airplanes and new ships as a result of proposals approved Wednesday by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, and the panel also took action that could reopen Jacksonville's Cecil Field Naval Air Station.

Even without a final decision on Cecil, Jacksonville was the biggest winner Wednesday. The commission voted to send 1,900 new jobs and five P-3 Orion squadrons to Jacksonville Naval Air Station and two ships and 400 sailors to Mayport Naval Station.

The only significant state loss was a decision to move the Navy's Officer Training Command from Pensacola Naval Air Station to Newport, R.I. About 1,600 trainees go through the command's schools every year, but relatively

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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few permanent jobs would be lost.

The panel, however, is scheduled to vote on other Pentagon proposals that could cost Pensacola nearly 1,600 military and civilian jobs.

The commission stopped short of closing Oceana Naval Air Station, Va., the Navy's master jet fighter base for the East Coast, and moving its planes and personnel to Cecil Field, which closed in 1999.

Instead, the panel set a six-month deadline for Virginia officials to deal with encroachment that has caused safety and noise problems while also asserting that "the future of naval aviation is not Naval Air Station Oceana."

That comment encouraged Gov. Jeb Bush.

"The ideal situation would have been for them to say 'close Oceana, move to Cecil,' which ultimately could be what they do, but they gave Virginia another chance," Bush said. "The threshold is pretty high if they're sincere about their admonitions."

Several commissioners praised the open space, lack of encroachment and existing facilities at Cecil compared to Oceana, surrounded by schools, shopping centers and thousands of homes.

"I believe the decision that was made really just postpones the inevitable," said U.S. Rep. Ander Crenshaw, R-Jacksonville.

Crenshaw said he doesn't believe Virginia officials have enough time to satisfy the commission's land requirements.

U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., agreed, saying: "It is a high hurdle for Oceana to achieve."

"Reopening Cecil Field will provide tremendous economic benefit to the community and state," Sen. Mel Martinez, R-Fla., said in a statement Wednesday. "More importantly, it will provide significant improvement in training for our naval aviators."

Oceana is Virginia Beach's largest employer, with a military and civilian staff of nearly 12,000. It is home to about 140 F/A-18 Hornets and Super Hornets and about 50 F-14 Tomcats.

If Virginia fails to meet the commission's requirements conditions, the panel said the Defense Department should consider Cecil.

Jacksonville Naval Air Station will gain about 1,900 jobs with the arrival of five squadrons of P-3 Orion patrol planes.

They would move from Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine, which the commission voted 7-2 to close.

Transferring the P-3s will cut operating and repair costs.

BRAC Panel OKs Bliss Plan

El Paso Times
Chris Roberts
August 25, 2005

Fort Bliss and El Paso are another step closer to receiving 16,000 soldiers and their families after a commission reviewing a Pentagon plan to realign the nation's military voted to approve and pass on to President Bush a recommendation to expand Fort Bliss.

With no discussion, the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted unanimously Wednesday morning to approve a Pentagon proposal that would bring in 1st Armored Division soldiers from Germany and other units from Fort Hood to Fort Bliss -- about 16,000 soldiers.

The Pentagon last month announced its intention to create another brigade of about 3,800 soldiers at Fort Bliss.

"Our gains today ... will result in almost 20,000 troops who, along with their families, will make El Paso their home in the coming years and will contribute greatly to our local economy," U.S. Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-Texas, said Wednesday

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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in a statement.

However, the commission also unanimously approved a Pentagon recommendation to move the Air Defense Artillery Center and School, with about 4,500 soldiers, to Fort Sill, Okla., from Fort Bliss. The move was proposed to create a "Net Fires Center" by locating the air defense school with the artillery school at Fort Sill.

El Paso officials argued that the center should be located at Fort Bliss, where all of the weapons -- from Patriot missiles to the artillery's big guns -- can be tested and fired. Oklahoma and Army officials argued that the school's training requirements don't require live missile firings.

Live-fire exercises would still be conducted at Fort Bliss, according to the proposal.

"I took a very careful look at this issue," said Commissioner James T. Hill, a retired Army general and El Paso native. "All the community concerns are valid points but the Army, in my view, answers them. ... The Net Fires Center ought to be at Fort Sill, and everything else can be mitigated in one way or the other."

The recommendation was approved despite the fact that Army calculations show it would save about \$300 million by putting the Net Fires Center at Fort Bliss. Commissioners apparently agreed with the Army rationale that force operations should be kept separate from training and administrative functions.

El Paso officials said it hurts to lose the school but point out that El Paso still faces unprecedented economic growth with the proposed changes.

"We're pretty excited about it, we've been preparing for about a year and a half to make sure we had all the facts," El Paso Mayor John Cook said. "We have our challenges ahead of us, but I think we've prepared ourselves to handle them."

The region could expect about \$1 billion in new construction in the first 12 months and a

doubling of that in three or four years, said Richard Dayoub, president of the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce.

Although there were no estimates of the economic impact of 16,000 soldiers moving into the community, Dayoub pointed to a University of Texas at El Paso study showing that more than \$550 million will be generated annually by the 3,800 soldiers in the 4-1 Cavalry, who are already arriving at Fort Bliss.

"It's an enormous injection into our economy of jobs and those are good-paying jobs," Dayoub said. "Our job is to support our soldiers and their families in the community, whatever (the soldiers) do."

El Paso officials worked hard to make sure commissioners understood that El Paso has adequate water, schools, housing and the other necessities required for all the soldiers proposed for relocation to Fort Bliss, said Bob Cook, interim director of the El Paso Regional Development Corp.

The commission also approved a recommendation to close a number of Texas Army Reserve centers and equipment concentration sites and create a consolidated center and maintenance facility at Fort Bliss. Another recommendation that was passed would relocate mobilization processing functions at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., to Fort Bliss, and designate it as the Joint Pre-Deployment/Mobilization Site Bliss/Holloman.

"There were no surprises for us," said Jean Offutt, Fort Bliss spokeswoman. "But we're still waiting for the other two steps, which will be the president and Congress."

The voting, scheduled to continue through Saturday when the package is to be finalized, will determine what changes the commission makes to the Pentagon's proposed list. The commission must send the final version to Bush by Sept. 8.

If Bush approves the list, he will send it to Congress. If Congress takes no action, the list

goes into effect. Congress can void the entire process by passing a joint resolution of disapproval.

The commission is scheduled to continue voting today on "Joint Cross Services" issues, which include a proposal to move 178 personnel from White Sands Missile Range to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. Proposals for the Air Force are scheduled for consideration Friday.

Holloman Air Force Base, near Alamogordo, would lose 17 airmen under current plans, and Cannon Air Force Base near Clovis, N.M., would be shut down.

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes