

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

May 31, 2005

Department of Defense Releases

N/A

National News Articles

Air National Guard may be losing out

Communities and congressmen prepare to make their cases for keeping military installations open as the base-closing commission begins its first public hearing

Critics fear base closures will split U.S.

Proposed closure of America's first submarine base riles Connecticut

IT community braces for base realignment

Rural Nevada town clings to its patriotism

Closed down U.S. bases to be nuclear repositories

Closings shifting military south

Saxton is enlisted to fight for base

Local News Articles

Planners consider redevelopment options if bases close (Atlanta, GA)

Unions to lose thousands if bases close (Portland, ME)

Community leaders mull possible uses for Ellsworth (Rapid City, SD)

'Plan B' For Threatened Bases: Gems at our door (Atlanta, Ga)

Niagara Falls, Already in Decline, Faces Another Blow (Niagara Falls, NY)

Base Realignment and Closure Commission skips New Orleans in recent base tour (New Orleans, LA)

Unions expect hit if shipyard closes (Portland, ME)

Base could take on land mission soon (Belleville, IL)

BRAC: Retention team gears up for Tuesday (Grand Forks, ND)

Base closings offer lessons Delivery hub for aircraft an option for Ellsworth (Sioux Falls, ND)

Deadline for BRAC has Utahns scrambling (UT)

Former politicians say base is safe (Pittsburgh, PA)

Air lab shutdown opposed in Mesa (Scottsdale, AZ)

[Otis Air Base Supporters See Hope in Official Visit Today \(Boston, MA\)](#)

[What's the base problem? \(Bucks County, PA\)](#)

Opinions/Editorials

[If a nation cannot protect its capital, what can it protect? \(Biloxi, MS\)](#)

[Show your support for the shipyard \(Dover, NH\)](#)

[Military matters: You don't look too hot](#)

Additional Notes

N/A

Department of Defense Releases

N/A

National News Articles

Air National Guard may be losing out

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (St. Louis, MO)

Philip Dine

May 29, 2005

As Missouri officials fight to save the 131st Air National Guard Fighter Wing at Lambert Field, and Illinois does the same for its Air National Guard F-16 unit in Springfield, a broader trend is evident: The Air National Guard stands to take a huge hit nationwide in base closings.

"It's pretty dramatic," John Goheen, chief spokesman for the National Guard Association, said Friday. "Our analysis of the data that's been released thus far reveals that about one-third of our flying units will be grounded."

Of 88 Guard flying units around the country, 28 are slated to lose their planes -- a far greater impact from the base closing process than is being felt by other military installations.

The Air National Guard would lose 166 airplanes out of 1,106 planes -- about 15 percent -- under the recommendations of Defense

Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, now being considered by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

Brig. Gen. Stephen Koper, retired from the Air Force, said the cuts will come at the expense of homeland security in the Midwest, reduced ties around the country between local communities and Guard units, and fewer options for governors in emergencies.

The 131st F-15 wing, for example, he said, plays a key deterrent role in "ensuring air sovereignty over the skies of St. Louis" and in protecting the "valuable infrastructure all over the Midwest." Every state now has flying units, but if the recommendations are accepted six no longer will have any, said Koper, president of the National Guard Association, an advocacy group.

What's behind the local closures that have outraged officials like Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond, R-Mo., and Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, is an aggressive effort at the national level -- where Pentagon and Air Force officials are seeking changes in the Air National Guard and readjusted ties between active and Guard components.

Koper alleged that not only are the changes -- including consolidating smaller units into larger ones at the expense of places like St. Louis and Springfield -- negative in themselves, but that the overall approach was fashioned without input from the Guard. At a meeting in Omaha of the adjutant generals of the Guard of all 50 states a few days ago, he said, the unanimous feeling was that they were excluded from the base closing process.

"Totally appropriate"

The Pentagon says that homeland security issues were considered in drafting its recommendations. And some military analysts contend that Rumsfeld's effort to consolidate bases and missions makes sense.

"I think it's totally appropriate," said Jim Carafano, military expert at the Heritage Foundation and a 25-year Army veteran. "It's a

recognition that you need to look at the services as a whole, rather than put them in separate boxes, and also that you can't afford the inefficiencies you've had in the Guard in the past, with small bases in a lot of places."

Since the end of the Cold War, Carafano said, military officials have taken a close look at the active force but have largely left reserve branches alone.

"The reserves are a small piece of the pie, but a very politically powerful piece of the pie," he said. "So the feeling at the Pentagon has been, 'Yeah, it's ineffective, yeah we don't really need it the way it is, but leave it alone. The gain's not worth the pain.'"

Loren Thompson, chief operating officer of the Lexington Institute, says the Air National Guard helped bring about its current plight.

"The Air Force is trying to implement a concept called the Future Total Force, that integrates the reserves and the active duty force into the best mix of capabilities," he said. "Unfortunately, at the state level the Air National Guard has fairly consistently resisted taking on the missions that the joint force really needs them to do. So now the Guard is complaining about reorganization efforts that would force them to change the way they do business."

For example, Thompson said, the Air Force "desperately needs more support from the Guard on operating unmanned aerial vehicles, but the Guard doesn't want to give up flying missions, so that makes it very difficult for the Air Force to use its scarce assets in the most effective way. The Air Force is trying to use the base closure process to organize itself for a different way of waging war -- and the Guard just doesn't want to give anything up."

Tricky situation

But the Guard says it's been excluded from decision-making over the Future Total Force as well. In a letter obtained by the Post-Dispatch, Maj. Gen. David Pataczak, president of the Adjutants General Association, wrote in March

to Gen. John Jumper, chief of staff of the Air Force, that homeland defense was being sacrificed as the new policy was formulated. He added that the Guard sought a role in its crafting but was not being "allowed to help in the process."

Guard officials say they understand the need to modernize, but they express consternation that their pilots, who often have more flying hours than active duty counterparts, aren't being asked to fly newer aircraft that are replacing the traditional ones.

"Why couldn't the pilots in St. Louis fly the F-22?" asked Goheen. "Why not use some of your most experienced pilots to fly the next generation of aircraft?"

Both sides have some justification, says Brookings Institution military expert Michael O'Hanlon. While the Pentagon is very good at "optimizing the economics" and figuring out the tradeoffs involved in moving people and missions around, governors and senators have a duty to protect the security of their states. It's not clear, O'Hanlon added, that Pentagon officials focused sufficient attention on the fact that "mid-sized to large-scale regional cities might need some protection from hijacked airplanes."

This backdrop creates a tricky situation for individual states like Missouri and Illinois, in terms of how best to present arguments for their Air National Guard bases.

One approach is to argue for the military value of a specific base, but the success of that will likely depend to some measure on the state's ability to show that Rumsfeld made errors in evaluating that base. Another is to argue more broadly that gaps in homeland security will be created, but that will raise a broader question of the overall approach of the Air Force and Pentagon -- which would in essence be asking the commission to reconsider Rumsfeld's strategic plans.

Missouri and Illinois both plan to argue for the effectiveness of their respective bases, including their regional importance, but Illinois has a

backup plan. State officials are preparing an argument on behalf of Blagojevich that the Pentagon has no right to close Guard units without the approval of the governor of the state involved -- since they serve under him.

"We think it would probably be a good idea if the state of Illinois went ahead and brought suit to get a judicial ruling," Koper said. "This issue has been mentioned but never adjudicated in recent base closing rounds. One thousand lawyers have looked at it and there are 1,000 different opinions, but the only opinion that counts will be that of a judge."

About 10 states have expressed interest in aligning themselves with Illinois if the state brings that argument forward, says Jack Lavin, director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development.

Missouri isn't among them at this point, but it is arguing for a delay in the scheduled June 7 commission hearing in St. Louis. Bond, joined by Sen. Jim Talent, R-Mo., and Sens. Dick Durbin and Barack Obama, both D-Ill., plus about 10 other senators, contended in a letter late Friday that the Pentagon's failure to release all data on how it reached its decision has prevented local officials from preparing their cases.

The letter, sent to Rumsfeld and base closing commission Chairman Anthony Principi, requests a two-week delay between the release of the material and the holding of regional hearings. Among the signers was Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., whose state stands to lose its F-15 Air National Guard unit.

Friday evening, Pentagon officials said they will be prepared by early this week to release more information that will help explain their recommendations.

Communities and congressmen prepare to make their cases for keeping military installations open as the base-closing commission begins its first public hearing
National Public Radio

Liane Hansen and Peter Overby
May 29, 2005

LIANE HANSEN, host:

The federal commission on military base closings made inspection visits in 10 states this month to examine facilities that the Pentagon wants to close or downsize. The list includes 33 major bases, with dozens of others slated for what's called realignment. This decision has attracted many lobbyists, and for those who specialize in military real estate, this is harvesttime. But they were laboring in the field long before the list came out, and some will continue long after the decisions are made. NPR's Peter Overby reports.

PETER OVERBY reporting:

Lobbyists and lawmakers will be working together this time to influence the Base Closure and Realignment Commission. That's BRAC to everyone who deals with it. The commission has the power to change the Pentagon's list, a power that Congress itself does not have. Next week, the commission starts field hearings. One will be at Rapid City, South Dakota, where nearby Ellsworth Air Force Base is on the hit list. Republican Senator John Thune got elected in South Dakota last fall, in part by saying he could keep Ellsworth off the list. Now he's one of several members of Congress pushing legislation to freeze the whole base-closing process.

Senator JOHN THUNE (Republican, South Dakota): To be in a just sort of indiscriminate way closing all of these bases around the country seems to be very poorly timed.

OVERBY: Legislation like this gets attention, and it might even work. But the most effective lobbying would make sure BRAC never even considered closing your hometown base.

Mr. PAUL HIRSCH (BRAC Lobbyist): The best way to avert a problem with BRAC is to get an early start.

OVERBY: That's BRAC lobbyist Paul Hirsch. His practice includes military base communities that he's represented since 1994.

Mr. HIRSCH: There's no silver bullet. There's no one method or idea here. It's a combination of ideas--national security, community participation, that military and civil service are great partners in the regions that they live in. And so it's a whole package, if you will.

OVERBY: Parts of the package? Making the Pentagon need the base, getting the Defense Department or Congress to assign new weapons systems to it, building alliances between the base personnel and the surrounding communities, and, above all, not waiting till the last minute and then asking members of Congress for help. Instead, Hirsch says you've got to educate Washington on the base's economic value--continually.

Mr. HIRSCH: In the case of a couple of our bases, they have had long-standing military affairs committees that visit Washington on an annual basis--the constant, gentle drumbeat of how valuable that military base is to their region.

OVERBY: Like most BRAC lobbyists, Hirsch learned about base closures on the inside. He was a top staffer for a BRAC commission in 1991. Bob Gillcash got his first BRAC experience in the next round, 1993. Working for Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd, a Democrat, Gillcash organized the effort to save the New London submarine base. Connecticut won that time, but now the base is back in the crosshairs. And Gillcash, now a lobbyist and consultant, has a counterintuitive idea for places like New London.

Mr. BOB GILLCASH (Lobbyist and Consultant): You need to fight like hell, but I also believe that in the event you find yourself unsuccessful, what is going to be plan B?

OVERBY: Gillcash wants to be a plan-B guy. He no longer represents communities that are trying to get a base off the list. He's focused on what happens after Congress and the president approve the final list.

Most observers expect this BRAC commission will keep most of the Pentagon recommendations. So Gillcash thinks he may be getting new clients soon, as reality sets in. He sees reasons for communities to be optimistic. For instance, wherever the military pulls out, it will leave behind a work force of civilians.

Mr. GILLCASH: There are entities out there that recognize that they're always going to have a need for smart, capable workers in a work force environment that don't have to move, that are earnest in their desire to make a go of it.

OVERBY: It will take months, at least, for local leaders to come around to Gillcash's point of view. In the meantime, they'll keep fighting to save what they've got. Peter Overby, NPR News, Washington.

Critics fear base closures will split U.S. Pentagon plan to expand in South raises concerns

Lansing State Journal (Lansing, MI)
Katherine Hutt Scott
May 31, 2005

Michigan would gain 125 military jobs under the plan. But W.K. Kellogg Airport Air Guard Station in Battle Creek would close, taking 274 jobs. Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Harrison Township would lose 216 jobs. In Lansing, the Stanley Parisian Army Reserve Center at 810 Marshall St. would close, costing the city 25 military jobs.

WASHINGTON - The Pentagon's recommendations for the next round of military base closings show a clear regional trend, cutting operations in the Northeast and Midwest, while further enhancing the South as a bastion of the nation's defense and military culture.

Some military experts and politicians say they're worried the process could create an unhealthy concentration of the military in the South, at the expense of the Northeast and Midwest, where the nation's bases and personnel already are underrepresented.

Representatives of the losing regions are calling for more consideration of the regional impact of military base closings.

They say the military could have more trouble recruiting in places where there is less military presence and less support to fund the military. Some officials who represent areas whose bases are in jeopardy of closing worry that concentrating the armed forces in one region might make them more attractive terrorist targets.

"Homeland security does require a (military) presence to protect all regions of the country," said John Burchett, director of the Michigan state government's office in Washington.

Others point out that concentrating more military presence in the South could further divide the country culturally and militarily.

John Pike, of defense analysis firm GlobalSecurity.org, says that while there are logical reasons for the move from the solidly Democratic Northeastern states to the mostly Republican Southern states, the trend could produce undesirable results.

"My concern is it would further polarize the country culturally into heavily militarized red states and demilitarized blue states," Pike said. "It's creating a situation where military bases are normal in states like Alabama and Texas and abnormal in states like Michigan and Wisconsin."

The Pentagon denies any regional favoritism in the latest round of base closings.

"It was not done by region," Pentagon spokesman Glenn Flood said. "The No. 1 criteria was military value (of a base) and that's what we based the recommendations on."

Under the Pentagon's recommendations, the Northeast, which has 14 percent of the nation's Defense Department personnel, would lose more than 14,000 jobs, according to a study by the Northeast-Midwest Institute, a nonpartisan Washington, D.C., research group.

The Midwest, which has 10 percent of the defense jobs, would lose 736 jobs. The South, which has almost half of the current defense jobs, would gain more than 10,000 jobs.

During the four previous rounds of military base closings since 1988, Michigan lost just under half its military jobs with the shuttering of Wurtsmith Air Force Base, K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base and the Warren Tank Arsenal.

On May 13, the Pentagon recommended closing 33 major bases and realigning 29 others. An independent Base Realignment and Closure commission will review the list.

Proposed closure of America's first submarine base riles Connecticut

Knight Ridder Newspapers
Dave Montgomery
May 30, 2005

GROTON, Conn. - The Pentagon's plan to close nearly 180 military installations has angered communities across the nation, but passions are especially intense here in Groton, where the proposed closure of America's first submarine base threatens to slam the region like a direct hit from a depth charge.

"Taking submarines out of Groton is like taking the cars out of Detroit," said Rep. Robert R. Simmons, a Republican whose district includes Groton and the New London Submarine Base. Echoing the outrage of thousands of constituents, Simmons assailed the Pentagon proposal as a "dumb, short-sighted decision."

Tucked along the Thames River in southeastern Connecticut, Groton has been home to the submarine base since 1915. Generations of submariners have gone to sea in diesels and nuclear behemoths, from World War I to post-Sept. 11, often returning to meld back into the community as part of the civilian economy.

Now residents of "the submarine capital of the world" are united in an emotional campaign to save the base. If it fails, Groton, with a

population of 40,000, would lose thousands of jobs and the linchpin of its modern-day heritage.

A delegation from the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission will visit Groton on Tuesday and Wednesday as part of a four-month-long review of the Pentagon proposals. Citizens and community leaders plan to mass along Route 12 with banners and miniature American flags as the commissioners pass by.

"We're not the average military town," said Bud Fay, a businessman who helps spearhead the "Save Our Sub Base" campaign. "We're a town that's blended with the military community. There is no dividing line."

The proposed closure constitutes the biggest single hit in the Pentagon plan, putting Connecticut in line to lose more jobs than any other state. The Pentagon projects a combined loss of 8,586 military and civilian jobs, but the governor's office says the statewide toll could result in 31,500 lost jobs, with an economic impact of \$3.3 billion.

The Pentagon's plan, which was unveiled two weeks ago, would shutter 33 major bases and shrink hundreds of other facilities, hitting the Northeast particularly hard. Also targeted for closure is the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, which opened in 1800.

Anthony Principi, chairman of the base-closing commission, said in an interview last week that the panel will closely scrutinize the potential impact on New England as it shapes a final base-closing package to give to the president by Sept. 8. The commissioners conducted initial hearings in mid-May and are now fanning out to conduct regional hearings and inspect targeted bases.

"Obviously, New England is of concern, given the magnitude" of the proposed closures, said Principi, who is expected to visit Groton with three other commissioners. "Military value is the most important criteria - it has to be given priority - but we must also be mindful of the economic impact as well."

Named after the larger city across the river, the New London Sub Base now has 18 nuclear-powered attack subs, 9,200 military and civilian personnel and an annual payroll of \$452 million. The Navy's only submarine school is here.

The proposed closure reflects a reduction in the size of the U.S. submarine fleet, from 93 attack subs in 1990 to 54 today. Navy leaders envision a further reduction, possibly down to 40 to 45. The United States now has three sub bases on the East Coast, two on the West Coast and one in Hawaii.

The Navy says it would save \$1.5 billion over 20 years by transferring New London's subs and personnel to Norfolk and Kings Bay. The one-time cost to implement the recommendation is projected at \$679.6 million, but the government will begin reaping annual savings of \$192.8 million within three years.

Connecticut Governor M. Jodi Rell, the state's two senators and five U.S. House members, along with a save-the-base task force and thousands of citizen volunteers, have responded with counter-attack designed to discredit the Pentagon's proposals.

Supporters of the base managed to knock it off the closure list in 1993 by proving that the Pentagon under-estimated the base's military value and closure costs and over-estimated the projected savings. Experts believe it would take decades and billions of dollars to clean up a site that has been saturated with toxic military waste for nearly a century.

Jeremiah Gertler, a senior analyst with the 1995 base-closing commission who is now with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said New London supporters may get commissioners' attention with the "Pearl Harbor" argument - that clustering submarines at Norfolk and Kings Bay could create big targets for terrorists.

Rell, a Republican, has assembled a "strike force" to dissect "every line" of the defense department data. She also has dispatched a team of experts to Kings Bay to see if the largely rural

area can absorb the influx, although regional leaders in Georgia are confident they have adequate housing and other services to meet the increased demand.

Scores of volunteers have started a "Save our Sub Base" command post in Groton's municipal building. The lead organizer is Fay, who has lived in Groton since the 1950s. He owns a cafe, car wash and laundromat, all of which draw about 30 percent of their clientele from the Navy base.

Like other townsfolk who look back on Groton's success in past base-closings, he is concerned but hopeful. "The panic normally associated with something like this hasn't taken place," he said. "People have faith they can do it again."

IT community braces for base realignment

Federal Computer Week
Frank Tiboni
May 30, 2005

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — More than 1,250 Air Force uniformed and civilian employees with information technology jobs in Dayton, Ohio, and Montgomery, Ala., face having their jobs move to Boston under the Defense Department's base realignment program.

In plans disclosed earlier this month, members of DOD's Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommended moving the jobs at three Air Force IT organizations to the Electronic Systems Center at Hanscom Air Force Base, Mass. The move would create a streamlined command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) organization.

Air Force officials speaking here last week said they supported the commission's decision to consolidate the three IT groups at the center. The center hosts the service's new Operations Support Systems Wing, which oversees procurement of the Air Force's business and combat support IT systems.

"We had a fragmentation of C4ISR for years," said Rob Thomas, deputy director of the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, Chief of Warfighting Integration and Chief Information Officer.

Frank Weber, director of the wing, said the rationale for the realignment was sound.

Speaking at a conference sponsored by the Montgomery chapter of AFCEA International, Thomas and Weber also acknowledged the importance of the 1,250 jobs that would leave Montgomery's Gunter Annex if the Operations and Sustainment Systems Group and the Engineering and Integration Systems Squadron move to Boston.

Thomas said that a cottage industry has grown around IT to the benefit of Montgomery's economy and the state of Alabama. The state's loss could be offset, however, by the commission's decision to move the Army Materiel Command from Fort Belvoir, Va., to Redstone Arsenal, Ala., he said, which would add 3,000 military jobs.

But Montgomery officials are still concerned about job loss. "The workforce and contractor presence means a lot to the economics of the city," said Paul Hankins, a municipal consultant for the city and the Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce.

The commission's decision could affect 3,200 Air Force and defense contractor IT jobs in Montgomery, Hankins said. The city got 2,000 new manufacturing jobs when Hyundai Motor Co. opened an automobile plant earlier this month. But Hankins said those jobs pay \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year, far less than the IT jobs that pay at least \$60,000.

Rural Nevada town clings to its patriotism

The Associated Press
May 30, 2005

HAWTHORNE, Nev. (AP) -- For more than 50 years, this struggling desert town that proudly

calls itself "America's Patriotic Home" has held what's billed as the nation's biggest Armed Forces Day parade.

Some 3,500 people turned out earlier this month for the celebration, complete with water fights, a watermelon eating contest, dunk tanks and horseshoe pitching.

But the pride masked fears: The Pentagon wants to close the nearby Army Ammunition Depot, which accounts for nearly half of all jobs in the remote Nevada town of 3,800, about 130 miles south of Reno.

"This base is the heart and soul of town. It's going to kill the town if they do away with it," home-maintenance business owner Larry Grant, 43, said as tanks, torpedoes, rockets and missiles paraded past.

"It would basically turn this place into a ghost town," said Operation Desert Storm veteran John Stroud, 47.

To the surprise of residents and Nevada's congressional delegation, the depot was included this month on the Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure list, commonly known as BRAC. A nine-member commission can change the list before it is submitted to the White House and Congress this fall.

Many residents attending the Armed Forces Day festivities sported T-shirts reading "No BRAC -- No Ghost Town -- NO WAY!!"

"If you don't have people living here, there's no one to buy," said Dean Shellenbarger, 40, a supermarket clerk. "Sooner or later you just have a huge hole in the ground."

"I wonder if we'll even have a school left," said sixth-grade teacher Christy Grant, 41.

Although it sits on sagebrush-covered desert more than 200 miles from the ocean, the 147,230-acre depot opened as a Naval Undersea facility for submarine munitions in 1930. It features more than 2,400 bunkers that hold bombs, mortar shells and other munitions, and

has shipped explosives for conflicts from World War II to the war in Iraq.

Today, Hawthorne seems frozen in its heyday era of World War II, a pit stop town of motels, gas stations and fast-food places framed by miles of bunkers. Travelers passing through on U.S. Highway 95, which doubles as the town's main drag, are greeted by a huge American flag flying from a 150-foot pole.

But the Pentagon says moving the depot's storage and recycling functions to the Tooele Army Depot in Utah would cut duplication and save money.

Supporters of the Hawthorne depot say the BRAC recommendation grossly underestimates the facility's economic impact on the town and neglects cleanup costs that would total more than \$400 million. They also say it fails to take into account the facility's superior ability to store and ship ammunition, and to decontaminate and recycle military explosives for use by the mining and construction industries.

"All we want is a fair shake and the true numbers presented," Stroud said.

The depot commander, Lt. Col. Johnny Summers, warns that Congress upheld 85 percent of recommendations in earlier rounds of base closures.

"It's not good odds, but we're cautiously optimistic," Summers said.

A local committee is mounting a letter-writing campaign to newspapers and politicians, starting a Web site, sending delegates to cities that successfully fought closure recommendations and applying pressure on the state's congressional delegation.

The depot's 534 workers are nearly half of the town's 1,200-member work force, and the depot also accounts for many indirect support jobs in the community. The town's second biggest employer is the El Capitan casino.

Hawthorne has been hanging by frayed economic threads for years because of the drought-threatened fishery in scenic but shrinking Walker Lake, mine closures and layoffs at the depot. At its zenith, it employed more than 5,600 people, and more than 2,000 military personnel were stationed here.

Shelley Hartmann, executive director of the Mineral County Economic Development Authority, said Hawthorne "is not going to become a ghost town."

"With that said, we realize we face some challenges, perhaps even some hard times," she said. "It is frustrating for a small town with limited resources to deal with such a blow."

Larry Mortensen, 78, a depot supervisor for 43 years until he retired in 1991, is prepared for the worst.

"I'm not very optimistic because once the Army gets something in mind they go stupidly forward," Mortensen said.

Closed down U.S. bases to be nuclear repositories

Aljazeera.com
May 30, 2005

In a small section of a spending bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives last week, closed military bases could become repositories for nuclear waste further exacerbating the fears of local lawmakers who are fighting the scheduled closure of four of New England's biggest bases.

The energy and water bill from the House Appropriations Committee includes \$15.5 million for the reprocessing of nuclear waste from power plants and construction of an interim nuclear waste dump. Though the legislation does not specify where that dump would be, the Appropriations Committee report, which explains the bill, suggests that mothballed military bases be considered as potential sites for the waste.

Lawmakers say the idea adds to the pain of a region that faces the loss of 14,500 jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars if the recommendations by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) are adopted.

Maine lawmakers met with the chairman of the BRAC to plead for Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, which is on the closure list, and the Brunswick Naval Air Station which is to be "realigned," or shrunk.

"I'm very, very concerned about this. Our citizens would be very upset," Maine Governor John Baldacci said when he was shown the committee report language. He said he had been unaware of the proposal, and "to think that someone could put nuclear waste there...is outrageous."

The Defence Department, which is under fire from Congress, promised to give lawmakers access to detailed material backing up its recommendations to shut down about 180 military installations across the country. As parts of the report are classified, the Pentagon said legislators and staff with security clearances can only review that data at a secure location in northern Virginia.

The Pentagon's concession only came following increasing demands from lawmakers and state and local officials for the release of what will be an unprecedented amount of data in defense of the base closing plan. Lawmakers hope to use the information to persuade the independent commission reviewing the base closings to remove certain installations from the hit list.

Representative Edward J. Markey said the proposal to put nuclear waste on closed bases was an insult to local communities that face a hardship from the job losses attached to the closings. "Congratulations -- you may have lost your military facility, but you may be the winner of nuclear waste coming to your community," Markey said.

He sought to kill the idea of temporary nuclear waste dumps by de-funding it in the energy and

water bill, but his amendment was defeated, 312 to 110.

The report emphasises the need to find interim sites for nuclear waste until the opening of a permanent nuclear waste repository. Yucca Mountain, in the Nevada desert, has been selected for permanent commercial nuclear waste disposal, but administrative and court actions have delayed the opening until at least 2012.

Sites such as shut military bases and other federally owned lands would be more cost-effective as temporary nuclear waste sites than privately owned parcels since they are federally owned and have security systems in place, the report said. It did not recommend any bases by name or location, or indicate a preference between bases that have been closed and those facing closure.

A Department of Energy spokesman, Mike Waldron, said the agency "is reviewing the proposal."

"However, we believe that a permanent geological repository is the right policy for America," he added, underscoring the administration's determination to open Yucca Mountain as a permanent site.

Environmentalists have raised concerns over the health and safety of residents near closed bases. President Bush last month suggested putting oil refineries on shuttered bases. The energy bill approved by the House last month would limit the state and local role in issuing permits for refineries -- a provision opposed by local officials.

Environmental activists are also concerned about language in the Department of Defence authorisation legislation making its way through Congress. The DOD is required by law to clean up closed military sites, many of which have accumulated toxins from handling radioactive material and lead paint among other substances, said Phil Clapp, president of the National Environmental Trust.

The Senate version of the Defence Department's bill says the fund for realignment and closures should be the "sole source" of funds to clean up the sites. Such language could be interpreted to mean that the Pentagon isn't responsible for cleanup once the BRAC funds are exhausted, or the fund is retired, Clapp said.

"There is literally no way of calculating how many billions -- or even up to a trillion dollars -- how much liability would be dumped on state and local governments for clean-up," Clapp said. "It's saying, 'once it's [depleted], that's your problem'," he said.

The House language states that the Defense Department cannot shirk its obligation to clean up contaminated former military sites. A Democratic House energy staff member said a revised House version made the language explicit once lawmakers realized it might free the Pentagon from responsibility to clean up the sites.

Baldacci joined other Maine lawmakers yesterday in a group appeal to Anthony Principi, chairman of the BRAC Commission. The lawmakers said that the Department of Defense has not produced the data, and that the documentation is required under law to support the closure decisions.

"This is typical stonewalling and obfuscation by the Department of Defense on base closings," Senator Olympia J. Snowe, Republican of Maine, said after the meetings.

Closings shifting military south

Norwich Bulletin
Katherine Hutt Scott
May 30, 2005

WASHINGTON-- The Pentagon's recommendations for the next round of military base closings show a clear regional trend, cutting operations in the Northeast and Midwest, while further enhancing the South as a bastion of the nation's defense and military culture.

Some military experts and politicians say they're worried the process could create an unhealthy concentration of the military in the South, at the expense of the Northeast and Midwest, where the nation's bases and personnel are already underrepresented.

Representatives of the losing regions are calling for more consideration of the regional impact of military base closings. They say the military could have more trouble recruiting in areas with little military presence and less support for military funding in those areas. Others in areas set to lose bases worry concentrating forces in one region might make them bigger targets of terrorists.

"Post 9/11, when you consolidate your naval or any other military assets in one section of the country, you're creating a larger target for your enemies," said Connecticut Democratic Sen. Joseph Lieberman, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, whose state would sustain the largest job loss. The Pentagon says Connecticut will lose 8,586 jobs, mostly through the proposed closure of the submarine base in Groton.

Others worry concentrating more military presence in the South could further divide the country culturally and militarily.

John Pike of GlobalSecurity.org, a defense analysis firm, says that while there are logical reasons for the move from the solidly Democratic Northeastern states to the mostly Republican Southern states, the trend could produce undesirable results.

"My concern is it would further polarize the country culturally into heavily militarized red states and demilitarized blue states," Pike said. "It's creating a situation where military bases are normal in states like Alabama and Texas and abnormal in states like Michigan and Wisconsin."

Under the Pentagon's recommendations, the Northeast, which has only 14 percent of the nation's Defense Department personnel, would lose more than 14,000 jobs, according to a study

by the Northeast-Midwest Institute, a non-partisan Washington research group.

The Midwest, which has 10 percent of the defense jobs, would lose 736 jobs. The South, which has almost half of the current defense jobs, would gain more than 10,000 jobs.

The Pentagon denies any regional favoritism.

"It was not done by region," Pentagon spokesman Glenn Flood said. "The No. 1 criteria was military value (of a base) and that's what we based the recommendations on."

On May 13, the Pentagon recommended closing 33 major bases and realigning 29 others.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission will review the Pentagon's list and by Sept. 1, make its final recommendations on which bases get closed.

Retired Air Force Gen. James B. Davis, co-chairman of Florida Gov. Jeb Bush's advisory group on the base-closure process, said the Pentagon has valid military reasons for moving its jobs.

"You may not like the results, but when you look at the process they go through, it makes sense to close the facilities they close," said Davis, who served on the BRAC commission during the 1995 round of base closings.

Pike and Davis listed various reasons for the move south since the middle of the 20th century:

During World War II, the Army built training camps in areas with the most population, which at the time was the Northeast and Midwest. After the war, the Army decided to move its camps to the warmer South, where soldiers could train year-round.

Twenty years ago, the Navy wanted to base its ships around the country to win widespread political support and avoid having its resources wiped out with one Pearl Harbor-style attack. But houses and businesses encroached on its

major ports in Boston and San Francisco, so the Navy pulled out of those cities and concentrated its ships in the less crowded ports of Norfolk, Va., and San Diego.

During the Cold War, the Air Force placed its bases in northern states to be closer to the Soviet Union and to be able to shoot down Soviet missiles before they hit U.S. cities. With the military now focused on Middle East countries such as Iraq, the bases are just as well positioned in states like Florida.

Now, Florida is home to three of the military's unified commands -- the Southern Command in Miami and the Central Command and Special Operations Command in Tampa. The Tampa commands are running the war in Iraq.

"They've been placed here, maybe because housing is cheap and the nice weather," Davis said. "Consequently, the center of gravity has shifted."

BRAC commission member Samuel Skinner, a former U.S. transportation secretary who is originally from Chicago, raised another possible reason for the southward shift. Skinner said at a May 17 hearing that the military appears to be more comfortable in the southeast than in other parts of the country.

"There are more military people down there and military people like being around other military people," Skinner said in an interview. But he added, "I can guarantee you that the commission is going to take a good hard look at these closings to make sure the logic is sound behind them, and if it's not we're going to make some changes."

**Saxton is enlisted to fight for base;
The congressman helped keep Fort Dix and
McGuire Air Force Base open. Now Fort
Monmouth is targeted.**

The Associated Press
Donna De La Cruz
May 30, 2005

WASHINGTON - New Jersey's secret weapon in its fight to save Fort Monmouth from the

Pentagon's budget ax is a South Jersey Republican with a perfect record of getting military installations off the base-closings list.

Rep. James Saxton, 62, a high-ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee from Mount Holly, is credited with getting Fort Dix (1988 and 1991) and McGuire Air Force Base (1993) off the closings list.

Even Democratic Rep. Rush Holt, whose district includes Fort Monmouth, praised Saxton's skill, and they have met several times to discuss ways to outmaneuver the Pentagon.

"There's nobody in the country who has been a better student and a more successful practitioner of the BRAC [Base Realignment and Closure] process than Jim Saxton," Holt said.

Defense analyst Loren Thompson put it this way: "If anyone can save Fort Monmouth, Jim Saxton can do it."

"Not only has Saxton been through this before, but he has substantive experience and service on committees that serve him well in this area, and his views just carry more weight," said Thompson, of the Lexington Institute, a think tank in Virginia.

The BRAC commission has approved 85 percent of the Pentagon's recommendations, so getting a base off the list is a rare feat, Thompson said.

Saxton credited the commanders at Fort Dix and McGuire for giving him ideas on how to convince the commission, which can remove or add a base to the list, that those installations were vital.

Fort Dix was Saxton's first test. He still remembers the day - Dec. 29, 1988 - when the Pentagon announced the bases it wanted to close.

"Fort Dix was on the top of the list," he said. "It got my attention real quick."

Saxton and his staff started to brainstorm, but it was Maj. Gen. Jim Wurman, Fort Dix's

commander, who came up with the key element of the plan: propose turning the active-duty post into a training center for reserve forces.

It worked. The commissioners put Fort Dix on semi-active status so the Army could explore that reserve-training idea. In 1991, Fort Dix was on the list again, but the commissioners instead converted the base from an active-duty post to a reserve-training center.

"We made rational arguments during those two BRACs, and Fort Dix was reborn," Saxton said.

In 1993, the Pentagon proposed closing McGuire and moving its mission to Plattsburgh Air Force Base in Upstate New York. Saxton and his staff sprang back into action.

They knocked down many of the reasons the Pentagon wanted to close McGuire by showing that the data were wrong, Saxton said.

For example, the Pentagon said there was a serious civilian air-traffic encroachment problem around McGuire, but base officials insisted that was not true. So state officials hired a pilot and flew up to check out Plattsburgh, landing at a nearby municipal airport, Saxton said. There on the taxiway was a sign that Saxton used to sway the BRAC commissioners his way.

"The sign is still burned in my memory," he recalled. "It said 'Pilots. Avoid a midair collision. Call Plattsburgh Air Force Base on frequency 120.9 to avoid a midair collision.'"

Plattsburgh's runway and the municipal airport's runway were angled toward each other. Saxton called it "an unexpected revelation."

His staff also found that Plattsburgh got its fuel shipments via barge, but that the nearby river often froze in winter. In contrast, McGuire gets it fuel via pipeline.

"We were able to demonstrate the utility of McGuire by simply using facts," Saxton said.

It worked. Plattsburgh closed instead of McGuire.

Saxton pointed out that McGuire and Fort Dix now have vital missions. Fort Dix provides final stateside training for Army Reserve and National Guard units preparing to go to Iraq or Afghanistan. McGuire is a major cargo port for resupplying troops stationed throughout the world. In this year's base-closings round, the Pentagon recommended adding hundreds of jobs to both installations.

In helping to keep Fort Monmouth open, Saxton said, he would apply what he has learned over the years:

"Stick to the facts. Just stick to the facts."

Local News Articles

Planners consider redevelopment options if bases close

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Atlanta, GA)
May 30, 2005

Some metro Atlanta communities are hoping for the best but planning for the worst as they consider redevelopment options for military bases in their area targeted for closing by the government.

Among the Georgia installations recommended for closing by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission are Naval Air Station-Atlanta in Marietta, Fort Gillem in Forest Park and Fort McPherson in East Point.

The communities are appointing committees made up of government officials, citizens, planners and businessmen to consider options if the recommendations are approved. Georgia's last chance to push to keep the bases open comes June 30. After the commission makes its final recommendations on Sept. 8, President Bush will send his recommendations to Congress.

Local officials note that lack of planning slowed base redevelopment in some other states during earlier closures.

"Plan B is very important. You don't want to wait (until a final notice) and throw your hands up and say, 'What do we do now?'" said Mayor Chuck Hall of Forest Park, where Fort Gillem is located.

Hall said his office is already getting phone calls from planning and development firms.

Fort McPherson has been in use as a military post since the 1830s. Many of its historic buildings were constructed of red brick beginning in the 1880s.

The Commandant's Quarters, which has 12-foot ceilings, hosted Gen. Douglas MacArthur when he commanded the fort briefly in 1925. It has a sleeping porch built for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who would stop over on trips to and from Warm Springs.

Redeveloping around those could be a challenge. But it is a historic area "that is probably better than anything in Atlanta" and could form a unique core of a new community, said Ellen Heath, a vice president in the Atlanta office of EDAW Inc., an international planning firm that has helped redevelop 29 previously closed military bases.

"I think it's a great opportunity to develop a nice, livable community inside the Perimeter," Heath said. "It's right on the MARTA line. It's got a lot going for it."

The Naval Air Station, at 166 acres, is smaller and adjoins the industrial complex of Lockheed Martin manufacturing and Dobbins Air Reserve Base. Its strength could be in marketing it to business or industrial concerns associated with flight.

The 1,427-acre Fort Gillem, with its well developed infrastructure of rail, roads and quick access to interstate highways and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, is well situated to develop as a new business park. Other discussions have included everything from creating new parks to commercial areas.

"The question is, how long is it going to take?" said Emory Brock, Clayton County's director of development.

Unions to lose thousands if bases close

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Portland, ME)
May 30, 2005

Union membership stands to take another major hit if the government succeeds in closing the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

Unions could lose more than 4,000 members if the shipyard closes. Three major labor organizations covering 2,300 tradespeople, 1,400 engineers and technicians, and 500 secretaries, police officers and other employees would be affected. Average pay at Portsmouth is about \$65,000 annually.

Nearly 1,900 of the yard workers live in New Hampshire.

The loss of union workers would continue a trend of organized labor losing its base in Maine. The state had 78,100 union members in 2000. That number fell to 63,700 last year, even as the state's overall workforce grew, according to federal labor statistics.

Many of the job losses have been in paper-making, shipbuilding and other manufacturing jobs.

"We have suffered some major hits with mill closings, but this would be bigger than those," said Edward Gorham, president of the Maine AFL-CIO.

The Pentagon has also proposed a major curtailment at Brunswick Naval Air Station and closing the Defense Finance Accounting Service office in Limestone.

The commission must make a final recommendation of which bases to close by Sept. 8. President Bush can either accept or reject the list in its entirety. It then becomes final unless Congress rejects it, also in its entirety.

Members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission plan to visit the Kittery submarine repair facility on Wednesday and the Brunswick base Thursday. Gov. John Baldacci said efforts were under way to also arrange a BRAC visit to the Limestone facility.

Union leaders are reluctant to talk about a future without the Kittery shipyard, focusing instead on trying to get it removed from the list of military bases to be closed nationally.

"I'm not thinking about what would happen to me and the union. I am not going there right now," said Paul O'Connor, president of the shipyard's Metal Trades Council, which has 2,300 members.

Community leaders mull possible uses for Ellsworth

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (Rapid City, SD)
May 30, 2005

Among the options for Ellsworth Air Force Base if the Pentagon follows through on plans to shut it down is to use the base as a hub for a large aircraft-based delivery business, community leaders say.

The base has a 13,500-foot concrete runway, 4.4 million square feet of office, warehouse and residential building space, and 5,400 acres of land.

Locally, some have speculated that Federal Express, United Parcel Service or a similar company might want the base.

Bob DeMersseman, head of the Rapid City Economic Development Partnership, said his office contacted Federal Express and other firms during the last base-closure round to gauge interest in Ellsworth facilities. They didn't have any interest at the time, but he plans to try again.

"We'll contact anybody that moves freight or people," DeMersseman said. "No stone will go unturned."

Spokesmen for both Federal Express and United Parcel Service told the Rapid City Journal it was doubtful they would need Ellsworth.

"We've been in business for a long time, and we have a mature network at this point," FedEx spokesman Ryan Furby said. "We operate out of many established airports, and we have strong relationships with those airports."

However, Furby did not completely reject the idea, saying it was too soon to tell whether Ellsworth could offer such an opportunity.

UPS spokesman Mark Giuffre said UPS would have no interest in the base.

"First and foremost is the fact that our hubs are strategically located and already well established," Giuffre said in an e-mail.

The company has regional hubs in Ontario, Calif.; Rockford, Ill.; Dallas; Louisville, Ky.; Columbia, S.C.; Philadelphia and Hartford, Conn. All are within driving distance of large population centers.

The Pentagon released its recommendations on May 13. The Base Closure and Realignment Commission is now reviewing the list, and may make changes. The list then goes to President Bush before it is sent to Congress for approval.

Members of BRAC are scheduled to visit Rapid City and Ellsworth on June 21.

If save-the-base effort fails, the first step in the Pentagon's recovery process is to offer the facility to other federal agencies, DeMersseman said.

'Plan B' For Threatened Bases: Gems at our door

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Atlanta, GA)
May 30, 2005

"Plan B" teams are quietly organizing in metro Atlanta. Their mission: redeveloping local military bases targeted for closing by the Pentagon.

The teams are keeping a low profile because Georgia's Plan A has always been to fight the closings like Trojans on the walls of their doomed city. Officials fear that developing alternative plans will give the Base Realignment and Closure Commission a hint that the state is willing to capitulate and quietly accept the shuttering of Naval Air Station Atlanta, Fort Gillem and Fort McPherson, which together pay out \$565 million a year in salaries. Positions for 4,000 civilian employees and 6,823 full-time and active military reservists will evaporate if the three bases close.

Those directing the fight, however, know that the chances of the bases' survival are slim and are preparing for the worst. Only 15 percent of the bases targeted in the last round of nationwide closings were granted a reprieve, and some think the percentage will be even lower this time around.

Mayor Chuck Hall of Forest Park, home of Fort Gillem, said, "Plan B is very important. You don't want to wait [until a final notice] and throw your hands up and say, 'What do we do now?'"

To avoid that, area governments are appointing committees to begin what could be a years-long process of directing the change from military to civilian control. The committees are made up of government officials, citizens, planners and businessmen.

Retired Gen. Phil Browning, who is leading Georgia's fight against closure, said the state wants to avoid the lack of planning, foresight and political infighting for control of base changeovers that slowed base redevelopment in some other states.

"About six months ago, the board of directors of the [Georgia Military Affairs Coordinating Committee] suggested to the governor that we change our focus from getting ready to fight

closing, because we had done about everything we could, to looking at Plan B," Browning said.

"Some communities have lost months and months and months getting their planning groups together," he said. "We want our groups ready to go as soon as we hear."

Atlanta has the controlling interest in Fort McPherson; Forest Park has Fort Gillem. Marietta and Cobb County are putting together the team for Naval Air Station Atlanta.

Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin has appointed East Point Mayor Patsy Jo Hilliard to the committee she formed. Fort McPherson is between the two cities.

Hilliard isn't happy about the potential closing of Fort McPherson.

"I was walking in town . . . and we saw all these military people in our restaurants," she said. "They really do patronize our businesses, and I know our business people will feel the pinch."

Hilliard has formed a city committee to work on softening the impact of the potential loss. But closing Fort McPherson won't be like closing an old industrial site.

"It has historic buildings, an [Army] museum, a pool, a lake, a golf course," Hilliard said. "Oh, my goodness, it has those rolling beautiful hills."

Fort McPherson has been in use as a military post since the 1830s. Many of its historic buildings were constructed of red brick beginning in the 1880s.

The Commandant's Quarters, which has 12-foot ceilings, hosted Gen. Douglas MacArthur when he commanded the fort briefly in 1925. It has a sleeping porch built for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who would stop over on trips to and from Warm Springs.

"It has gorgeous houses, tree-lined streets, and would make a beautiful community," said Emory Brock, Clayton County's director of development. Fifty buildings on the 488-acre

post are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Redeveloping around those could be a challenge. But it is a historic area "that is probably better than anything in Atlanta" and could form a unique core of a new community, said Ellen Heath, a vice president in the Atlanta office of EDAW Inc., an international planning firm that has helped redevelop 29 previously closed military bases.

"I think it's a great opportunity to develop a nice, livable community inside the Perimeter," Heath said. "It's right on the MARTA line. It's got a lot going for it."

The Naval Air Station, at 166 acres, is smaller and adjoins the industrial complex of Lockheed Martin manufacturing and Dobbins Air Reserve Base. Its strength could be in marketing it to business or industrial concerns associated with flight.

Brock said that 1,427-acre Fort Gillem, with its well developed infrastructure of rail, roads and quick access to interstate highways and Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, is well situated to develop as a new business park. Other discussions have included everything from creating new parks to commercial areas.

"The question is, how long is it going to take?" Brock said.

Hall, Forest Park's mayor, said his office is already getting phone calls from planning and development firms.

The results of a successful base transition can be spectacular, if difficult and time-consuming, when the right combination of market forces and local drive come together.

Lowry Air Force Base in Denver closed in 1991, costing Denver and the adjoining town of Aurora 7,000 jobs and \$295 million in annual spending. It took 10 years, but the successfully redeveloped base now has 3,000 new houses, 100 businesses and 10 schools and is home to more than 20,000 workers and residents.

Other communities have been less successful. K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base near Marquette, Mich., was closed in 1995 and turned into an international airport in 1999. In 2003, 103,000 passengers used it --- about 280 a day.

Communities trying to redevelop closed bases in urban or suburban areas have distinct advantages over those in rural areas, Heath said. Bases near fast-growing areas often have a ready market for reuse.

All three metro Atlanta bases have seen suburban development gobble up all the large tracts of land around them.

"Fort McPherson is inside the Perimeter, and we all know how hot that housing market is," Heath said.

Browning, the retired general, wants the committees to have redevelopment plans ready for consideration within 18 months of the expected final word in November --- a tough task, he admits, considering the complexity of a base turnover.

The committees can apply for planning grants from the federal government to help pay for the costs.

Committee members will visit the bases to inventory their buildings and infrastructure and then hammer out ideas and compromises over what they envision. Once a plan is in place, complex negotiations with the military and federal government over turnover timetables, the appropriateness of redevelopment and price will begin.

Some bases have been given back to local governments, especially if a public use, such as a park, is planned on the land. In other cases, the governments buy the bases or act as a middleman to sell the property to developers.

The turnovers can happen in stages as the military moves out, and bases can be redeveloped piecemeal. The naval yard in Charleston, S.C., was closed 10 years ago, but

the Charleston Naval Complex Redevelopment Authority did not receive the final pieces of property until this year.

Turnovers can also be delayed by environmental problems left behind by the military, such as sites where fuel was stored or spilled. The military is responsible for the cleanups.

Once all sides reach agreement, a state-legislated implementation group, using the plan as a guide, will handle the property transfers, financing for redevelopment and marketing of the property.

On June 30, Georgia has a last chance to plead its cases to the commission to keep the bases open. The commission will turn over final recommendations to President Bush on Sept. 8, and he will send his recommendations to Congress, which must accept or reject all of them as a package.

Niagara Falls, Already in Decline, Faces Another Blow

The New York Times (Niagara Falls, NY)

David Staba

May 30, 2005

Tom Linton's job history embodies this region's steady economic decline.

He worked as a puncher in a steel-fabrication plant until the factory closed, then as a part-time janitor at an elementary school and a clerk at an auto supply shop. After the owner died, Mr. Linton took over, but after a decade, a nearby chain store started selling parts and paint at prices he couldn't match.

He responded by turning the shop into TL's Trading Post, selling closeout and overrun items from larger stores, including children's toys and clothing and 50-pound bags of dog food. At least 15 percent of his business comes from employees and reservists at the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station nearby, which is Niagara County's second-largest employer.

But the air station, New York's lone Air Force base, will close if Congress approves the

recommendations of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. The 642 full-time jobs at the base would vanish. As many as 2,000 reservist positions would move to either Maine or Arkansas.

"I'm a survivor," Mr. Linton, 56, said about the prospect of losing so many customers. "But you hope it doesn't happen. I don't know that I could afford to do this someplace else."

Other businesses have similar concerns. Merrell Lane, a Niagara Falls funeral-home owner, estimated that the base contributes \$150 million annually to the local economy.

Forty years ago, Niagara Falls was a boomtown, when construction of the New York State Power Authority's hydroelectric plant along the Niagara River below the world-famous falls inflated the city's population to more than 100,000.

But soon after the plant was completed, industrial jobs began to leave not only Niagara Falls, but also the entire western end of the state. And by the late 1970's, the city once famous as a honeymoon destination had become better known for the environmental disaster in its Love Canal neighborhood.

By the 2000 Census, the population of Niagara Falls had fallen to 55,593, with a median household income of \$26,800 -- more than 36 percent below the national average.

"The Western New York economy is really hurting compared to most areas of the country," said John B. Sheffer II, the executive director of the Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth at the State University of New York at Buffalo. "A base closing is going to have a larger and tougher impact in Niagara County than in an area where the economy is booming."

Mr. Lane, the funeral-home owner, is chairman of the Niagara Military Affairs Council, a group of local officials and businessmen that defeated an effort in 1995 to close the base and is trying to do the same thing again. The group has based its arguments mainly on the facility's military importance, particularly its proximity to an

international border and the hydroelectric plants on both the Canadian and American sides of the Niagara River, which supply power to much of the Northeastern United States and southeastern Canada.

But the economic impact is at least as important, Mr. Lane said, both in terms of the full-time employees and reservists -- 75 percent of whom live within 50 miles of the base -- for whom service in the Air Reserve is a second job.

"There are the full-time people out there who spend paychecks in the community," Mr. Lane said. "And the extra money the reservists derive from working out there part time allows them to purchase a little more than they normally would."

Mr. Sheffer said the combination of a shrinking population and high rates of unemployment and poverty magnified the effects of losing the air base.

Nor are there many opportunities in the private sector for those displaced workers. According to a 2002 report by the local governance institute, the five largest employers in Western New York were the federal government, the State of New York, the Buffalo City School District, Erie County and the University at Buffalo.

The biggest new employer to arrive since that report is the Seneca Niagara Casino, which opened in 2003 and employs about 2,000 full- and part-time workers. The opening of the casino coincided with a push by local and state officials to jump-start the area's declining tourist economy.

But this has been thwarted, to some degree, by the lack of commercial flights at Niagara Falls International Airport; the last commercial carrier pulled out in 2000. The nearest airport is Buffalo, 20 miles away. The closing of the air base could make things worse.

"The implications for tourism to the falls, which is one of the primary factors in the local economy, are pretty discouraging," Mr. Sheffer said.

Then there's the psychological effect.

"It's a symbolic hit for an area that tends to lack self-confidence and which is being destroyed in the private sector by state policies on taxation and spending," said Lawrence Southwick, an associate professor in the University at Buffalo's School of Management.

Mr. Lane's group, which helped save the base during the last round of closings a decade ago, has retained a lobbyist in Washington while waging a grass-roots campaign that includes sending letters, e-mail and petitions to the Pentagon, Congress and the White House, along with a series of public rallies leading up to a public hearing by the base-closing commission scheduled for June 27 in Buffalo.

"Our focus is on keeping what we've got," Mr. Lane said. "It's easier to keep what you've got than to try to redevelop something."

But Mr. Linton said he was prepared to adjust and adapt, just as he and the region have been doing throughout his adult life.

"If it happens, we have to move on," he said. "That's reality. What are you going to do, sit in the parking lot and cry?"

Base Realignment and Closure Commission skips New Orleans in recent base tour

New Orleans City Business (New Orleans, LA)
May 30, 2005

The Naval Support Activity base in Algiers and Bywater was not among the military bases toured last week by the Washington, D.C.-appointed Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

The nine-member commission can decide whether to add bases to or take them off a closure list.

Last week, members of the BRAC Commission began visiting bases the U.S. Department of Defense recommended for closure or realignment, including sites in North Carolina, Virginia, Oregon and Missouri. The commission also toured bases in Southern states, including Georgia and Alabama.

No date has been listed for the New Orleans visit.

The U.S. Department of Defense plans to close 33 major U.S. bases as well as dozens of smaller installations to save \$48.8 billion over 20 years. The DOD published a list May 13 of bases recommended for closure or realignment, which included Naval Support Activity, a base employing about 4,600 people. The BRAC Commission can edit the list before sending it to President Bush Sept. 8 for approval.

The commission is expected to continue touring throughout the summer.

Unions expect hit if shipyard closes; The potential decrease in the unionized workforce comes as membership in Maine is already shrinking.

Portland Press Herald (Portland, ME)
May 30, 2005

Maine's labor unions stand to lose more than 4,000 members if the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard closes, dealing one of the largest single blows to the state's unionized workforce at a time when membership already is declining.

If approved by Congress and President Bush, the closure would wipe out the yard's three major labor organizations, cutting 2,300 tradespeople, 1,400 engineers and technicians, and 500 secretaries, police officers and other employees.

"We have suffered some major hits with mill closings, but this would be bigger than those," said Edward Gorham, president of the Maine AFL-CIO.

The potential loss of union workers comes as unions in Maine are struggling with shrinking

membership due to job cuts in manufacturing, like the paper industry. In 2000, Maine had 78,100 union members. That number fell to 63,700 last year, even as the state's overall workforce grew, according to federal labor statistics.

Unions are looking to new industries, from hospitals to car dealerships, to find members. But Gorham says the rapid decline in manufacturing jobs makes it difficult to keep up. The closing of the Kittery shipyard by the Pentagon would increase this challenge.

"It definitely would hurt organized labor," said state Sen. Bruce Bryant, D-Dixfield, who started his political career as a paper mill union president. "It would hurt their ability to get their message out. It would become even smaller."

Union leaders are reluctant to talk about a future without the Kittery-based shipyard, focusing instead on trying to get it removed from the list of military bases to be closed nationally.

Paul O'Connor, president of the shipyard's Metal Trades Council, is focused on keeping his 2,300 members working. Union officials spend their days juggling phone calls to Washington, D.C., with questions from workers about their future.

"I'm not thinking about what would happen to me and the union. I am not going there right now," O'Connor said.

The Pentagon this month recommended Portsmouth's shutdown as part of a national list of closures and military personnel shifts. The shipyard's closure - and plans to move more than 2,300 military personnel from Brunswick Naval Air Station - is in front of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

The commission must make a final recommendation of which bases to close by Sept. 8. Bush can either accept or reject the list in its entirety. It then becomes final unless Congress rejects it, also in its entirety.

If the closure of Portsmouth is not stopped, the exit of union workers would continue the trend

of organized labor losing its base - paper making, ship building and other manufacturing jobs. The Portsmouth yard overhauls nuclear submarines. Average pay for an employee is about \$65,000.

"This is just another case. It is like losing several paper mills," said Christopher "Kit" St. John, executive director of the Maine Center for Economic Policy. "It is part of a trend. It is not the end."

The challenge for unions is to organize in new industries. A district office for the machinists' union, for example, is trying to organize nurses aides and medical technicians at a nursing home in Freeport. Joe Flanders, the district's business representative, said 93 workers will vote next month on whether to join a union.

Besides health care workers, unions in Maine are looking to organize auto mechanics at car dealerships and workers at restaurants and hotels. The Maine AFL-CIO is helping the Passamaquoddy Tribe try to pass state legislation to build a racino in Washington County. Gorham said the project could mean union jobs.

One challenge to adding union members is federal law. Labor leaders say it leaves workers who try to start a union open to retaliation from their employers. And even if federal labor officials step in, it often comes months, if not years, after the organizing effort has been stopped.

Godfrey Wood, chief executive officer of the Portland Regional Chamber, says more employees may feel valued and fairly treated at work and not have a need to organize.

"If there is value gained by organizing, people will join," Wood said.

Although union leaders concede the closure of Portsmouth would be a blow to their membership, they see labor remaining a strong voice in Maine, pushing issues such as higher wages, health care and retirement benefits.

"I wouldn't say it would be a severe blow. It would be a blow. We would definitely survive," said Flanders, the machinists representative.

St. John said even with losses, few groups in Maine have a membership that is as large and as organized as the unions. They continue to be a constant presence at the Maine Legislature and are a force in elections, helping among others U.S. Rep. Michael Michaud, D-Maine, and Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry when he ran for president last year.

This political savvy and organizing ability is on display in the campaign to save the Portsmouth shipyard. Union members outside New England, including workers at Boeing Co. in Washington state and public employees in New Jersey, are expected to start writing their senators and representatives, each saying how good the Portsmouth shipyard is.

Base could take on land mission soon

Belleville News-Democrat(Belleville, IL)

Jennifer A. Bowen

May 29, 2005

If the Department of Defense gets its way, Scott Air Force Base will receive the command that handles land transportation for the nation's military.

The move to Scott of the Army's Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command -- Transportation Engineering Agency, in Newport News, Va., was among Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's recommendations to the Base Realignment and Closure Committee earlier this month.

The recommendations included closing 33 major military installations and realigning 29 more. Besides that, 775 smaller installations, mostly National Guard or Reserve centers, are recommended to be closed or realigned.

The Military Surface command has offices in Virginia at Fort Eustis, Newport News and Alexandria, and has 484 jobs, according to the

Department of Defense. This is the second time a BRAC process has moved it.

Closures in 1995 of Oakland Army Base in Oakland, Calif. and Military Ocean Terminal Bayonne in Bayonne, N.J., combined the command from both bases and sent it to Newport News, Va.

"The Army's component runs port operations for us, both here in the states and overseas," said Navy Capt. Chuck McWhorter, spokesman for U.S. Transportation Command Headquarters.

"They handle all of the household goods moves that military people do worldwide," McWhorter added. "They coordinate and manage rail movements and work with the rail industry. They work with trucking companies for the shipment of other cargo in the U.S. and arrange for overground shipments of materials in the theater."

The agency is a good fit for the improved system envisioned for the U.S. Transportation Command Headquarters, which is already at Scott and is also known as Transcom.

"The secretary of defense wanted to consolidate the defense transportation system here at Scott," McWhorter said. "By consolidating the components, we are eliminating a lot of redundancy that exists right now."

The BRAC recommendations are all part of Rumsfeld's plan for a leaner, more agile joint military force. The commission is reviewing the Pentagon's recommendations and will determine whether any changes will be made. In past BRACs, more than 80 percent of the recommendations were approved by the commission.

McWhorter emphasized that for now, the transfer of the U.S. Army Surface Deployment and Distribution Command Operations Center to Scott is just a recommendation.

"I don't know at this point if they will come to Transcom and retain their own identity or be absorbed into the Transcom Headquarters," he

said. "Either way, it's a net gain in jobs for Scott."

Even if the recommendations are approved as is, Scott won't see the new Army command or the new jobs for at least three years. A majority of the employees at the command are civilian.

If the command moves to Scott, it will be the second here of the three components of U.S. Transportation Command's air, land and sea mission. Air Mobility Command Headquarters at Scott fulfills the air component of the mission.

The third component is handled by the Military Sealift Command, which has headquarters in the Washington Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. It provides sealift and ocean transportation for the Department of Defense. Part of Military Sealift Command's mission is to provide ocean transport of equipment, fuel, supplies and ammunition to sustain U.S. forces worldwide.

"Under the secretary's recommendations, the Military Sealift Command will not be consolidated with the other two," McWhorter said. "The vast majority of what Sealift does is support the Navy and support the fleet by replenishing ships at sea. The work they do at Transcom is a very small part of their overall mission."

The Military Surface command employs civil, mechanical and computer engineers, operations research analysts, transportation specialists, computer specialists, engineering and computer technicians to ensure the military can rapidly deploy, and sustain, armed forces anywhere in the world. It is responsible for the global, joint movement of combat units, sustainment cargo, service member household goods and privately owned vehicles.

Before January 2004, the Military Surface Command was known as the Military Traffic Management Command.

BRAC: Retention team gears up for Tuesday;

Strategic work for June 23 presentation is on the agenda

Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)

Elisa L. Rineheart

May 29, 2005

Two hours is what the Grand Forks base retention team will have to convince Base Realignment and Closure commissioners that the Grand Forks and Fargo bases must remain open and gain new missions.

Grand Forks Air Force Base and Fargo's 119th Air National Guard Fighter Wing were slated for realignment May 13.

The BRAC commission is scheduled to tour Grand Forks Air Force Base June 22. The three-member delegation will hold a hearing for Fargo and Grand Forks from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. June 23, in the Chester Fritz Auditorium.

The base retention team will review its strategy for the BRAC hearing in a closed-door session with city officials and state representatives Tuesday in Grand Forks, said Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D.

"We're going over the elements of the presentation and figuring out how we are going to divide the time," Conrad said.

There will be an informational meeting for the general public at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday in the Alerus Center, he said.

In the weeks following the Pentagon announcement, base retention leaders have been meeting with Air Force officials and seeking additional information to strengthen base retention arguments, Conrad said.

"A lot has happened since the last meeting (in Grand Forks)," he said.

New strategy

After learning more about the Pentagon decision to realign Grand Forks, base retention leaders decided to shift gears and pursue unmanned

aerial vehicle missions more aggressively than tanker missions, Conrad said.

He said the delegation is getting used to the idea of retaining some KC-135R Stratotankers as opposed to the entire air refueling wing.

"The strategy is to embrace the UAV mission and show why Grand Forks has been rated to have such high military value and to keep some tankers in Grand Forks," Conrad said.

The Fargo Air National Guard is expected to play an undisclosed role in UAV missions, he said.

New airplanes?

On the negotiation table are plans for Fargo to host a new flying unit, the C-27 Spartan, a twin turboprop engine airplane. Nicknamed "Chuck," the Spartan is a medium size cargo airplane that carries up to 18,000 pounds of fuel and flies farther than cargo helicopters.

Leaner and lighter

The Pentagon recommended earlier this month that 80 percent of the base's military personnel and 36 tankers be transferred to other bases around the country. That's nearly half of the 50 airplane fleet.

This BRAC round will help the Air Force achieve its goal of creating smaller fast-responding units - "24 is the magic number," said Gen. Michael Haugen, the North Dakota Guard commander.

He also said that he doesn't agree with the concept because guard fighter units such as the "Happy Hooligans" in Fargo have been highly effective with only 15 F-16s.

One of the arguments base retention leaders plan to make at the hearing for retaining two of the base's four air refueling squadrons is that the runway repair project was not factored into the Pentagon's equation for rating military infrastructure. This had an adverse impact on the

base's overall score and debilitated its chances of keeping the entire mission, Conrad said.

"The new runway was not part of the evaluation. In fact, we were hurt by the condition of the old runway," he said.

But Daniel Else, a base-closure specialist at the Congressional Research Service, said that without looking at the actual numbers behind the Pentagon's decision to realign the base, he could venture to guess that location played an even greater role than the condition of the runway.

Else said the Grand Forks base was built during the Cold War to fly bombers over the polarized cap to the former Soviet Union.

He said that Grand Forks was mentioned in several areas of the BRAC report including medical and headquarters support, which indicates that the Pentagon looked at all aspects of the base's mission.

Else said that the optimal place for a tanker base is between where bombers are stationed and the areas where they are going to be operating at such as Africa, Latin America and Asia.

"Grand Forks is not on the flying route to Europe or any of those places," he said. "Essentially you're in the wrong place."

The Pentagon usually adds "what if" scenarios to data calculations such as the economic impact of closing the base and the possible benefits of repairing the runway, he said.

Conrad said that he learned in conversations with Air Force brass that Grand Forks and Fargo runways received low marks. But there's no way of knowing how much runway conditions hurt the base until the Pentagon releases BRAC documents outlining the reasoning behind its decision.

The tankers are not scheduled to leave Grand Forks until 2009, which allows for UAV missions to evolve over time, said Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D.

Because unmanned aircraft require less people to fly and maintain, the size of incoming UAV squadrons is likely to be smaller than that of departing tanker units, Else said.

For the most part, he said, "You just need a guy with a little joystick and a couple of guys to swap out parts on the aircraft and you don't need nearly as much runway because UAVs are a lot smaller."

Grand Forks is one of only two UAV units in the Air Force. The other is Beale Air Force Base in California, Dorgan said. The Northern California base was recently realigned so it could host a larger UAV mission.

What makes Grand Forks a better candidate for hosting UAV operations?

The very same thing that hurts it for hosting tanker missions - "location, location, location," Else said.

The military usually tries to locate assets near training areas. Also, the Federal Aviation Administration doesn't want unmanned aircraft flying in commercial air space for too long, he said.

North Dakota's air space is practically free of commercial traffic, which makes it ideal for high and low altitude UAV training missions, Conrad said.

The chances of getting UAV missions are high because of Grand Forks location near the Canadian border, but it will be a while before the sophisticated combat and surveillance aircrafts come to the base.

"You'll be getting a newer model, the Predator B, and those haven't been built yet," Else said.

The Predator B, nicknamed Hunter-Killer, carries more weapons systems, flies higher and remains airborne longer than its predecessor, the Predator.

Another delaying factor is that the Air Force is still trying to figure out what missions they want UAVs to perform, Else said.

UAV Center of excellence

Dorgan, a member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, said he is preparing to include a proposal in the defense appropriations bill this summer for a UAV center of excellence that would fund joint ventures between the Air Force and UND's aerospace program.

"Emerging technologies are developing and we have the opportunity to engage the center for space science with the Air Force for training and research issues," Dorgan said.

Base closings offer lessons Delivery hub for aircraft an option for Ellsworth Bitter division in California could be instructive for Ellsworth

Sioux Falls Argus Leader (Sioux Falls, ND)
John Yaukey
May 31, 2005

IRVINE, Calif. - Even the Marines were surprised by the intensity of this fight.

"Civil war" is how the people of Orange County describe their 10-year battle about what to do with the 4,700-acre El Toro Marine Corps Air Station, slated for shutdown in the 1993 Base Realignment and Closure round.

The fight - waged in court, on the Internet and at the polls through four ballot initiatives - cost almost \$100 million. Meanwhile, El Toro, which once employed almost 1,000 civilians, was being used as a parking lot and a weekend landing strip for a model airplane club.

Two camps formed: residents who wanted green space and carefully planned development to break up southern California's infamous sprawl and those who wanted to turn the former military air station into a civilian airport with overseas service.

What both sides can agree on now is that this was no way to handle redevelopment of a closed base.

Missteps with El Toro could provide lessons for the 33 communities now facing major base closures under a Pentagon plan to consolidate and restructure the military. Ellsworth Air Force Base east of Rapid City is among the largest bases the Pentagon intends to close.

The key lessons former Irvine Mayor Larry Agran offers: "Air out the controversies early. Plan for debate on the front side of the process."

To call El Toro a failure of the closure process would not be fair, at least if measured at the polls.

Almost 60 percent of Orange County voters chose a plan to mix residential development with public parks and sports fields. And in a few years, they'll have it.

But if it was a success, it was an excruciating one.

And plenty of players in the process still see it as a miscarriage of public policy.

Dave Ellis, a pro-airport consultant, maintains military airports such as El Toro are valuable assets, and selling them for development is not in the public interest.

"This was a dogfight, no doubt," said. "In the end, I believe that the best use for an airport is as an airport. And the BRAC process didn't allow for that. That's a mistake in my view."

Meg Waters, who became the public face of the anti-airport movement, called El Toro "the poster child of what not to do when a base closes."

While happy with the outcome, she and other like-minded Orange County residents said the reuse process was hijacked early on by the airport proponents.

The El Toro saga illustrates that perhaps the most important part of a base closure is the selection of a successful reuse authority. If done right, it helps build consensus early and can go a long way in avoiding the infighting that tied up Orange County.

The BRAC statutory language is vague on how this is supposed to work. It says simply that the community affected by the closure is supposed to create a reuse authority that the Department of Defense deems legitimate.

Initially, the process seemed to work in Orange County.

The first redevelopment authority was to consider aviation and nonaviation uses for the base.

That fell apart in 1994 when recession-plagued Orange County declared bankruptcy, and the reuse process stalled in a funk of politics.

Airport advocates narrowly passed a countywide ballot initiative calling for air service at El Toro, and the war was on.

In 1995, federal officials designated Orange County's pro-airport board of supervisors as the official reuse authority. The board moved ahead with plans to build an airport despite opposition.

In 2000, voters effectively said no to an airport by a 2-to-1 margin in a ballot initiative shot down by the courts as "constitutionally vague."

The county kept pushing for an airport, approving an environmental impact report for a facility capable of handling 29 million passengers annually.

"This was just plain arrogant," said Len Kranser, a retired businessman who headed a grassroots Internet campaign that helped defeat the airport plan.

Eventually, Orange County voters overwhelmingly passed the Great Park plan in 2002.

Kranser said, "We could have saved enormous amounts of time and money if we had a better process in the early going."

RAPID CITY - Among the options for Ellsworth Air Force Base if the Pentagon follows through on plans to shut it down is to use the base as a hub for a large aircraft-based delivery business, community leaders say.

The base has a 13,500-foot concrete runway, 4.4 million square feet of office, warehouse and residential building space, and 5,400 acres of land.

Bob DeMersseman, head of the Rapid City Economic Development Partnership, said his office contacted Federal Express and other firms during the last base-closure round to gauge interest in Ellsworth facilities. They didn't have any interest at the time, but he plans to try again.

"We'll contact anybody that moves freight or people," DeMersseman said. "No stone will go unturned."

Spokesmen for both Federal Express and United Parcel Service told the Rapid City Journal it is doubtful they would need Ellsworth.

"We've been in business for a long time, and we have a mature network at this point," FedEx spokesman Ryan Furby said. "We operate out of many established airports, and we have strong relationships with those airports."

However, Furby did not completely reject the idea, saying it is too soon to tell whether Ellsworth could offer such an opportunity.

UPS spokesman Mark Giuffre said UPS would have no interest in the base.

"Our hubs are strategically located and already well established," Giuffre said in an e-mail.

The company has regional hubs in Ontario, Calif.; Rockford, Ill.; Dallas; Louisville, Ky.; Columbia, S.C.; Philadelphia and Hartford, Conn. All are within driving distance of large population centers.

**Deadline for BRAC has Utahns scrambling
They'd like more time to prepare report about Hill**

Deseret Morning News (UT)
Leigh Dethman
May 31, 2005

HILL AIR FORCE BASE — Developing a game plan for the Base Realignment and Closure Commission isn't easy.

There are just too many variables, too many reports and too little time.

As an expected June 6 public hearing with BRAC commissioners looms, the Utah Defense Alliance and members of the state's congressional delegation are busy preparing closing arguments in the case of Hill Air Force Base vs. base closure and realignment.

At the hearing, Hill backers will most likely tout the base's strengths, as well as pinpoint other possible missions that can be accommodated at Hill.

"A lot of it is not that we can't tell you, we just haven't zeroed in on it," said Rick Mayfield, executive director of the Utah Defense Alliance. "There are opportunities that we're still working on, a strategy on what to do and what to go after."

The delegation is trying to buy more time by possibly moving the June meeting to July.

Moving the date would accommodate the delegation's congressional voting duties and give Utah's installations a chance to see what other bases are pitching to BRAC.

Changing the date is unlikely, since the commission already changed the expected public hearing to June 6 from June 7. The hearing's time and place haven't been announced yet. Commissioners are expected to visit Hill before the public hearing.

Utah leaders are specifically interested in the plans of an Air Force base in New Mexico. Cannon Air Force Base is slated for closure, but base supporters there will not stand down without a fight, said Vickie McCall, president of the Utah Defense Alliance.

Hill stands to gain from Cannon's loss: The Pentagon recommended at least six of Cannon's F-16s be shipped to Hill. But if Cannon supporters can convince BRAC commissioners to remove the base from the closure list, Hill could be in trouble. Commissioners are expected to visit Cannon nearly three weeks after touring Hill.

"In fact, if Cannon stays open and they can make a case, they will probably come after our F-16s because they are going to claim they are the F-16 fighter base, and if they stay open, they have to justify their presence by expanding their mission and the number of aircraft they have, so we could be very vulnerable to Cannon," McCall said.

But that will only happen if BRAC changes the Pentagon's proposal. In four previous BRAC rounds starting in 1988, commissioners have accepted 85 percent of the Pentagon's recommendations for closure or consolidation.

If Cannon does close and the commission doesn't drastically change the Pentagon's recommendations, Hill's two fighter wings will unite.

The merger is a test case for the Pentagon's Future Total Force plan. Reserves from the 419th Fighter Wing would merge with the active-duty 388th Fighter Wing. This type of union is new for fighter units, said Col. Gary Batinich, commander of the 419th Fighter Wing, a reserve unit. Five other fighter units are also trying out similar unions.

"We're trying to be better, more efficient and more capable to meet what we perceive as the future threat," Batinich said. "The whole idea with transformation is we're moving the Air Force away from the Cold War threat. We're

transforming it to be leaner and meaner and more efficient."

Key to this transformation is consolidating fighter wings, each with 24 aircraft in its fleet. BRAC commissioners will play an important role in achieving this goal.

The Pentagon recommended that 15 of the F-16s currently assigned to the 419th be shipped to other units in Florida and Texas. By adding the six fighter jets from Cannon, the new 388th Fighter Wing would be at the Pentagon's goal of 24 aircraft per wing, Batinich said.

"We want to be something stronger, more combat capable," said Col. Robert Beletic, 388th Fighter Wing commander. "Obviously the whole purpose is to make our military more efficient . . . and we will be better stewards of our nation's taxpayer dollars."

The merger is expected to take place in the next year and a half. Both Beletic and Batinich said young pilots and mechanics from the 388th will benefit from the experience of the reserves of 419th.

"We actually had people accept airplanes here into this unit, and they were crew chiefs until the plane went to the boneyard, until it was retired," Batinich said. "That's pretty unique. If something goes wrong, they've seen it all before. We have a lot more experience."

Former politicians say base is safe Reserve station could escape closure for second time in 10 years

Pittsburgh Business Times (Pittsburg, PA)
Dan Reynolds and Jennifer Curry
May 31, 2005

Fears that an Air Force Reserve Station in Moon Township will close are unfounded, according to the politicians who governed Allegheny County when the base escaped a previous U.S. Department of Defense closure list.

On May 13, the U.S. Department of Defense announced that the 911th Airlift Wing Reserve

Station was one of 10 Air Force bases nationally that would close under a 20-year plan to consolidate the military and save billions of dollars.

The commission made a similar recommendation for the 911th in 1995, but local military representatives and politicians rallied to save the base. Former Democratic Commissioner Mike Dawida, who took office in 1996, says he expects the base to avoid the military's final closure list once again.

"I understand all the history. I'm confident that the base will not be on that list," Mr. Dawida said.

Space debate

The 911th is home to eight of the Air Force's C-130 transport planes, big cargo planes that carry troops and equipment. But at 115 acres, Air Force analysts have decided the base is too small and can't be expanded to house 16 C-130s, which would make it big enough to survive under the consolidation guidelines.

"Pittsburgh ARS (Air Reserve Station) land constraints prevented the installation from hosting more than 10 C-130 aircraft," the Base Realignment and Closure Commission said in its report.

The BRAC recommended the base's eight planes be sent to Pope Air Force Base, where they can better serve the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, located at nearby Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, N.C. The planners say closing the 911th and realigning the Yeager Airport Guard Station in Charleston, W. Va., will save taxpayers \$2.5 billion over 20 years.

Yet, the BRAC's contention that the base has no room to expand is misleading, according to politicians involved the last time the base escaped closure. Former Allegheny County Republican Commissioner Bob Cranmer, now a vice president for business development with engineering firm L. Robert Kimball and Associates' Downtown Pittsburgh office, said the Air Force has never taken the county up on

offers of as many as 77 additional acres for the base.

"The Air Force had no intention of expanding that base," Mr. Cranmer said. He said numerous conversations between high-ranking Air Force personnel and county officials in the late 1990s led him to believe that the Air Force has never had any need for additional land in Moon Township and never will.

The county has set aside 53 acres for the base's expansion, but the Air Force hasn't moved to lease it. According to 911th spokeswoman Cathleen Snow, the unit has a memorandum of agreement with the county that lets it use 21.7 of the 53 acres. She said the land can be used whenever the airfield is under construction and has been used continually since 1993.

Ms. Snow said with the 21.7 acres, the unit can park up to 17 aircraft, one more than what the Air Force analysts say the base needs to make the cut.

"We plan to bring that information to the attention of the BRAC," said Bill Ries, chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Melissa Hart, a Republican from McCandless.

Numbers vs. politics

Mr. Cranmer, a nine-year veteran of the U.S. Army who served 11 years in the U.S. Army Reserves, said he is convinced that when the dust settles, the 911th will survive. The base is on the list for political reasons and will be taken off for reasons that are equally political, he said, declining to be more specific.

"I just know how the process works," he said. "I am relatively confident, no, I'm more than confident that they are not going to stay on that list."

"That's a political read, I don't know that I agree," said Col. Jerry Kintigh, a former operations commander at the base who was one of the leaders in the fight to save it back in the mid-1990s. Col. Kintigh said hard numbers are

what convinced the Air Force to keep the base last time.

"It was saved last time because the Pentagon, in their zeal to close bases, determined how many bases they were going to close and then came up with numbers to justify it. They skewed the numbers to match the criteria," he said. "Some very wise citizens crunched the numbers and determined that they were contrived."

"I validate that," said Lt. Col. Lowery Bailey, who served as the Support Group Commander at the base from 1993 through the fall of 1998. Lt. Col. Bailey said local reservists were able to convince the Air Force that the 911th was one of the cheapest Air Reserve stations in the country to operate, not one of the most expensive, as the Pentagon had put forth as a reason for closure.

Cargo competition

The proposed closure also has jogged memories of a debate over whether Allegheny County's economic development efforts conflict with the base's best interests.

In the late 1990s, county economic development officials said developing seven buildings housing 600,000 square feet of cargo and office space at the airport could bring \$70 million in private investment and create between 1,300 and 1,500 new jobs. Detractors feared such growth would crowd the base, leaving it no room for expansion and thus more vulnerable to military budget cuts.

"This whole thing reminds me of 1996, 1997 and 1998," said Larry Dunn, a former Republican county commissioner who opposed plans to build cargo facilities.

Since then, only one cargo warehouse has been built near the base. Bob Miller, facilities director for Aviation Facilities Co. Inc. of McLean, Va., said his company spent \$6 million building the 50,000-square-foot cargo building north of the base. He said the building has two tenants who occupy 10,000 square feet, but has no solid leads for other tenants.

"We've been digging, we've been shaking the bushes and nothing is even close to being concrete," Mr. Miller said.

Air lab shutdown opposed in Mesa

East Valley Tribune (Scottsdale, AZ)

Blake Herzog

May 30, 2005

The secret to much of the success in redeveloping the former Williams Air Force Base into a business and educational hub lies with the Air Force Research Laboratory, which survived the 1993 base closure.

Now the south East Valley finds itself facing closure of the lab, which has drawn hundreds of new jobs to Williams Gateway Airport and formed strong ties to Arizona State University East, the two major tenants of the former base.

As an ASU East faculty member and a founder of a research institute which works with the lab, Nancy Cooke is involved with both sectors. She said both need to be cautious as the effort to keep the lab from closing moves forward.

"We're walking a fine line, because we want to keep the lab from moving and we'll do what we can to keep it here, but we also don't want to have the image of everything spiraling downward," she said.

The research lab is in the middle of the former Air Force base property at Power and Williams Field roads in Mesa. There, the Warbird Readiness Research Division develops and tests new technologies for training fighter pilots in flight simulators.

The research lab's new commander, Col. Dan Walker, said he's already noticed how closely military and public scientists work together.

"We're so integrated that the only way you can try to tell who's military and who isn't is by what they're wearing, and then you can't even tell," said Walker, who learned the lab was on the closure list on his way out to Arizona.

Much of the leading-edge technology and expertise is supplied by companies that have located at the airport. Military scientists study the effectiveness of the new technology with ASU professors and students.

Airport and government officials say it's too soon to estimate how much of this momentum would be lost if the lab doesn't get the seven votes it needs from the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission to remain open.

Airport spokesman Brian Sexton said roughly 150 people are employed by companies working closely with the Air Force lab, including L-3 Communications and International Simulations and Training Systems.

Roc Arnett, executive director of the East Valley Partnership, said the lab creates nearly 500 jobs including its own 88 employees and associated contractors.

Mesa Chamber of Commerce executive director Charlie Deaton said he doesn't have any statistics on how much of a damper losing the lab would be on the local economy, "but it's pretty obvious when you lose a high-tech activity, you're going to lose a little bit of the edge we had planned for the Williams Gateway area to have."

Roger Schvaneveldt, director of ASU East's applied psychology unit, said his program is small, with 52 undergraduate and graduate students, but has been growing by 20 percent a year, largely because students have academic and internship opportunities at the lab.

He said the applied psychology program's research includes studying how F-16 pilots interact with the Air Force lab's cockpit simulators and with each other. The goal is minimizing the risks pilots face while flying planes.

Cooke heads the Cognitive Engineering Research Institute, a nonprofit research institute that studies the role human psychology plays in

how teams of ground-based controllers steer unmanned planes.

Airport and government officials will focus now on how to reverse the research lab's planned closure.

That initiative began with a meeting of public and private sector interests earlier this month.

Otis Air Base Supporters See Hope in Official Visit Today

Boston Globe (Boston, MA)

Matt Viser

May 31, 2005

Four of the nine members of the military base closing commission plan to visit Otis Air National Guard Base today, the first time in the panel's tour of bases on the chopping block when more than two commission members will be evaluating whether the Pentagon's recommendations are right.

The commission's chairman, Anthony J. Principi, plans to lead the delegation touring the base on Cape Cod as lawmakers press for access to the information that the Pentagon used to recommend the closings. Tomorrow, the same four commissioners also plan to visit Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, where local supporters say they will line the streets wearing bright yellow T-shirts that say "Save Our Shipyard."

Proponents of keeping Otis open said the number of commissioners to attend today indicates that they are taking the argument seriously. A spokeswoman for US Senator Edward M. Kennedy, who has been lobbying to keep the base open, said today's visit "is obviously a little bit more of a big deal now."

"Getting four of the nine commissioners to come here so quickly may be a sense of their uncertainty over the decision that has been made," said Richard LaFarge, a Bourne selectman who is in a coalition lobbying to keep the base open. "Hopefully that's the case."

The commissioners who plan to visit include Principi, Lloyd W. Newton, Philip Coyle, and James H. Bilbray. Previously, only Newton was scheduled to make the trip to Otis.

Robert McCreary, the commission's deputy director of communications, said yesterday that Principi was able to come to Otis because another site visit, to a naval air station in Willow Grove, Pa., had been rescheduled. He said he was unsure why Bilbray and Coyle were now visiting, but that it is possible for commission members to request to visit a base. Bilbray and Coyle previously have toured bases only in Washington and Oregon, McCreary said.

"Everyone's asking the commissioners to come to their base," he said. "If they had the best case scenario, they'd all be there at every base. But they just try to do the best they can [and] it's up to the commissioners wherever they want to go."

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld on May 13 recommended closing 33 major bases to save \$48.8 billion over the next 20 years. Under his plan, New England would suffer the biggest job loss of any region, losing nearly half of the 29,000 jobs that would be eliminated nationwide.

Closing Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, would eliminate nearly 4,500 jobs and would save \$1.3 billion over 20 years, according to Pentagon estimates. Closing Otis and combining its mission with facilities in Florida and New Jersey would eliminate 505 jobs and save \$336.1 million.

The nine-member Base Closure and Realignment Commission is evaluating Rumsfeld's proposal before making a recommendation by Sept. 8 to President Bush. The independent commission -- made up of retired military officers, Pentagon officials, and lawmakers -- can add a base to the list with seven votes or remove a base with five votes, but the president must vote the entire list up or down by November.

Specialists say it will be more difficult than in past rounds of base closings to spare bases

because it will take seven votes -- instead of a simple majority -- to add a base to the list, and the commission would probably have to recommend a new closure to take one off the list.

At least one commission member plans to visit each base that is proposed to close. Last week members visited 20 bases, but none of the visits had more than two members. Of the 47 base visits remaining, about a dozen so far are scheduled to have four commission members, McCreary said.

In addition to the site visits, 15 regional hearings are scheduled, including one in Boston on July 6.

By tonight, the Pentagon is expected to allow lawmakers and staff with security clearance to view the entire digital database that was used to make the decisions about which bases to close, and by Saturday, all unclassified data is to be made available to the public. Until now, only a one-page summary has been available for each base being closed or realigned.

Aside from the potential job loss, the impact of the environmental cleanup could be dramatic for New England bases. A recently completed Pentagon study estimates that it would cost nearly \$600 million and take 27 years to clean up the three major New England bases slated for closure.

The study says it would take \$538 million to clean up the Massachusetts Military Reservation, which includes Otis as well as a Coast Guard facility and an Army National Guard post. It would take until 2032 to finish cleaning up the chemical and fuel spill sites, landfills, and former firefighter training areas at the military reservation, according to the report released last month.

It would cost \$23.1 million to clean up the New London Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Conn., and it would cost \$35.3 million and take until 2016 to clean up Portsmouth, the report said. There are at least four potentially contaminated sites at the 297-acre shipyard,

which is the nation's primary center for overhauling Los Angeles-class nuclear attack submarines.

Retired Navy captain William D. McDonough, a former commander of the shipyard who is leading the Save Our Shipyard Campaign, said he is "very pleased" that four commissioners are planning to visit, adding: "We'd be happy to offer a lobster dinner, if they want to stay."

What's the base problem?

Bucks County Courier Times (Bucks County, PA)

Paul Ruppell

May 29, 2005

Willow Grove - There isn't one answer for why the military has decided that the Willow Grove Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base is expendable.

Several factors were at play, according to military branch reports explaining their base realignment and closure methodologies.

The U.S. Navy says shuttering Willow Grove would reduce "excess capacity" while creating "new joint opportunities" at New Jersey installations like McGuire Air Force Base and Fort Dix, where most Navy and Marines jobs would go.

Those bases, about 35 miles away, are still considered convenient for reservists in the region.

Planes assigned to squadrons on the Air Reserve Station here are being retired or sent away, at least partly due to low marks given Willow Grove's airstrip.

Among the biggest considerations were dollars and cents, though no one can double-check the Defense Department's math until it releases the rest of its documentation. Still, advocates for the Horsham base are readying arguments to keep the base open.

The Suburban Horsham-Willow Grove Chamber of Commerce and elected leaders will fire their bullets at a hearing in Baltimore, Md., on July 8 and 9.

Retired Marine Maj. Gen. Ron Nelson, a local member of Gov. Rendell's Base Development Committee, said that if they can shoot a few holes in the varied justifications, "then there's a credibility loss there, and I think we've found a few holes already."

Overall, Reserve and National Guard facilities make up the bulk of the recommended base realignments and closings nationwide.

The Navy, doing its part to comply with DOD's cost saving and force reduction mandates, is cutting back on active duty and Reserve forces.

The remaining Navy Reserves are being moved closer to full-time sailors to share training and equipment.

The changes already had diluted Willow Grove's aircraft and missions before the May 13 announcement that it had landed on the BRAC hit list. After looking at 35 Navy and Marine installations, and a number of scenarios and reviews, Willow Grove was one of two bases recommended by Naval Aviation Operations for closing.

That command also listed McGuire Air Force Base as one of four bases from other branches that "demonstrated potential opportunities as receiving sites for Navy or Marine Corps" squadrons.

So, moving units from Willow Grove is a marriage that lets the Navy ditch a runway, several unused hangars and other "excess capacity" while it "maintains reserve forces in areas with favorable demographics," meaning a major metropolitan region.

BRAC commissioners - who review the recommendations and issue a report to the president by September - have posed many questions in Capitol Hill hearings about the wisdom of consolidating so many reserve

centers because of possible further harm to recruitment and retention.

Ike Puzon, a former naval base commander and now Washington, D.C., consultant hired by the local chamber of commerce to help fight BRAC, has qualms about the Navy's approach.

"The system that we're going back to in the Navy Reserves is one that failed in the 1950s and '60s," he said.

Politicians often called Willow Grove one of three joint reserve bases nationwide with the kind of cooperation between branches and shared resources wanted in a more efficient fighting force.

But it's slated to close, while the other two - in Fort Worth, Texas, and New Orleans - would pick up more jobs.

A ratings system used by the Air Force to assess airstrip capabilities may shed light on why this happened. Willow Grove had lower scores in all but one of eight categories. It was also far behind McGuire.

Many of the aircraft used by Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard units at Willow Grove would be retired. However, nine A-10 Thunderbolts from the 111th Fighter Wing are being shipped to bases in Idaho, Maryland and Michigan.

The military's justification is that the move places the planes at airstrips of higher value and increase efficiencies by creating larger squadrons.

Puzon and others were very surprised by the 913th Fighter Wing's loss of all its C-130 cargo planes, but particularly by the "deactivation" of the 111th. That squadron was activated three times in four years, going to Iraq and Afghanistan, and it seems unlikely guardsmen will want to travel to follow the planes.

"Why they picked that unit is beyond anybody's comprehension," Puzon said.

It is estimated that it will cost \$126.3 million to close Willow Grove and military activities at Cambria Regional Airport in Johnstown, Cambria County, and then relocate people and assets.

But, during implementation alone, costs and savings are expected to top \$134.7 million.

Annual recurring savings will be \$60.6 million. Payback is expected within two years.

The projected savings over 20 years are \$710.5 million.

Meanwhile, the Defense Department says job losses are expected to be less than 0.1 percent of total employment in the Philadelphia area.

Base advocates around the nation are waiting to take a whack at these financial figures, the documentation for which has yet to be released by the Pentagon.

Even without the worksheets, Ed Ebenbach of the local chamber thinks a 1,200 jobs-lost figure for Willow Grove is "grossly understated."

Nelson also feels the apparent absence of reservists in the job numbers was a glaring oversight and indicative of something more on DOD's part.

"They don't seem to be very concerned about the people, certainly the reserves," Nelson said. "... A little extra travel? So what. That's what they seem to be saying."

Opinions/ Editorials

If a nation cannot protect its capital, what can it protect?

Biloxi Sun Herald (Biloxi, MS)

Neal Pierce

May 30, 2005

The Department of Defense is suggesting it's too dangerous, in this terror-threatened time, to leave thousands of its civilian workers in

commercial office buildings right across the Potomac River from the nation's capital.

But if that's true, shouldn't the Pentagon, also right across the river, be relocated itself to some far-off spot? Indeed, hasn't the Pentagon been a terrorist target already?

And if we want to be ultra-safe, why not reconstruct the White House in some mountainous underground bunker?

Buried in the new Base Realignment and Closure Plan (BRAC), released by the Defense Department on May 13, are repeated references to a secretly formulated policy by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to disperse facilities away from the nation's capital. Also at play: new Pentagon requirements that buildings with DoD offices anywhere be set at least 82 feet back from traffic, to protect against truck bombs.

So Rumsfeld's department wants to shift tens of thousands of defense jobs away from accessible, rail-served centers in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Arlington and Alexandria, close to the Pentagon. And in large measure (18,000 jobs alone) to Fort Belvoir, in an already traffic-clogged and transit-inaccessible area 18 miles southwest of Washington.

Are these "security trumps all" policies part of some anti-city, pro-dispersal plan for all of American society?

Some people suspect so, but there's no clear evidence; the nationwide base closures on the BRAC list, for example, hit Republican as well as Democratic areas.

Still, if one wanted to undercut urban America and its dense cities and inner suburbs, then federally dictated dispersion and requirements for bunkered buildings with big setbacks would be a nifty strategy. Timothy McVeigh and Osama bin Laden could, as some suggest, be recognized as the most influential urban architects of the 21st century.

There are two massive problems with letting such a scenario play out.

1.

The first is the tricky nature of true "security." Robert Peck, now president of the Washington Board of Trade and a former commissioner of the federal government's Public Buildings Service, notes that "the Pentagon on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, was as well defended against a truck bomb as anyone can imagine. So our enemy simply flew their bomb in over the jersey barriers."

Peck quotes a U.S. ambassador to a Middle East country at a security conference in 2000 saying the U.S. had built an embassy with every security guideline imaginable: "We're behind a wall, on the outskirts of town, and 20 minutes from all government offices. It looks like the walled Soviet embassies we used to make fun of. But now we're 20 minutes from the country's downtown government offices, which means I have to drive and fear I'll be ambushed and kidnapped along the way."

As for transferring so many of today's Arlington and Alexandria defense workers to Fort Belvoir, Peck notes: "It's a medieval view - put everyone behind the moat, and they'll be safe." Christopher Miller, president of the Piedmont Environmental Council, is even more blunt: "What's the gain? Fort Belvoir will become a target in and of itself."

And, adds Miller: "If you can't protect your capital, what place is safe?"

2.

The second massive flaw in the Pentagon's urban dispersal push is its destructive impact on thoughtful growth practices - how the Washington region, for example, has been trying to slow sprawl and focus jobs and housing near public transit inside the Capital Beltway.

Jay Fisette, chairman of the Arlington County Board, spoke for many when he declared: "This single decision by an isolated federal agency contradicts all the vision and planning and

progress of the region over the past decade... in terms of 'smart growth.' "

Oftentimes the Pentagon couches its location decisions on the basis of costs; the nationwide set of BRAC proposals now pending are claimed, for example, to save nearly \$49 billion over 20 years.

But there are other critical impacts to consider, notes Peck - impact on growth patterns, transportation, public transit, our regions' heavy reliance on cars. "The cost to society has to be considered - not just the cost to the Pentagon budget," he insists.

The even deeper issue is that a single federal agency, with literally zero public debate, has decided to use its secretly reached security decisions and its claimed budget savings to play havoc with growth and transit plans carefully conceived, discussed and moved toward reality by local governments, businesses and civic groups.

The precedent, especially if other federal departments start to emulate it, is an ominous one - not just for the Washington region but communities across the United States. The hearings before the BRAC commission, which makes its recommendations to President Bush on Sept. 8, may be crucial.

Will the concrete heel of federally decreed security measures start to devastate urban America? Without a strong nationwide chorus of protest, it could happen.

Show your support for the shipyard

Foster's Online (Dover, NH)

May 30, 2005

You can do something this week to show your support for the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

At noon on Wednesday, there will be a rally near Gate #1 of the shipyard, the area in downtown Kittery. It's your best chance and those of your neighbors to impress on members of the Base Realignment and Closure

Commission what the shipyard means to the people of New Hampshire and Maine [EM] and all the people of the United States.

The BRAC visit to the shipyard will probably be the only one before it acts on Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's recommendation to terminate the shipyard.

The commission has to be made aware of the shipyard's importance to national defense and the economy of the region.

A lot of talk recently has been about alternatives to the shipyard and the tens of millions of dollars it generates each year. While preparation for all contingencies is wise, some of the talk is taking on fatalistic tone. It's the kind of tone that does nothing to advance what ought to be everyone's primary goal [EM] saving the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

The shipyard is vital to the economic interests of New Hampshire and Maine and the national security interest of all Americans.

The closure recommendation isn't just about 4,800 jobs. It's about an impact on the lives of more than 2.5 million people, the combined populations of two states. Think about that in making plans for Wednesday.

Think about what the loss of 4,800 jobs means to businesses and industries in New Hampshire and Maine. Think about the impact those job losses will mean in terms of good jobs no longer pumping millions of dollars into local economies. How many local businesses will fail if those jobs are lost?

Every business and industry in the region ought to be represented in identifiable form at Wednesday's rally in Kittery.

The fight to save the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is recruiting people from both New Hampshire and Maine. Show that you care. Wednesday, make every effort to be with people who think the way you do. Be in Kittery at noon.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his royal court are on a path to do what no foreign foe has been able to do in more than 200 years. They are on a track that will weaken this country's defense effort and make the American homeland more vulnerable to attack than at any time since Japan's 1941 sneak attack on Pearl Harbor.

It is not Rumsfeld's intent and those of his aides to weaken U.S. defenses. However, the presence of intent is not a necessary ingredient in bringing about an unforeseen result.

It was only a decade ago that the submarine fleet was regarded as vital to the defense of the United States and its allies. Today, as our enemies become more bold and their numbers increase, Rumsfeld has approved the closure of a base vital to maintaining the efficacy of our country's underwater fleet. Repair and overhaul are necessary for any fleet to be effective. The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is outstanding in this regard. Its record of under-budget, on-time, high-quality work stands out among both private and public shipyards. Its 4,800 member workforce is as good or better than any other.

And the Department of Defense under Donald Rumsfeld wants to ignore it all. The explanations are few. Either the department's top management is ignorant or it is arrogant. We'll vote for the latter.

Rumsfeld and his top aides want to make their mark on U.S. defense. They want to make changes. And they want to do so without sharing data supporting their decisions. It is an arrogance that has enraged the joint congressional delegation.

It is true that the nature of war has changed. The American people will give Rumsfeld that. War today is homeland security and quick response. Technology has changed the face of war in the 21st century just as it did in the 20th and 19th centuries — and today's technological change will appear rudimentary in the next decade or two.

The current round of proposed base closings is as inexplicable as it is devastating to the defense effort.

There is a sad irony this Memorial Day.

Today is a day on which we remember the hundreds of thousands of men and women who gave their lives in defense of their country over more than two centuries. At the same time, there are people in government whose proposals will serve to weaken the defenses for which so many have fought and died.

Military matters: You don't look too hot

Knight Ridder Newspapers

Joseph Galloway

May 30, 2005

WASHINGTON - It was, I suppose, as inevitable as bluebonnets in a Texas spring: Shortly before Memorial Day, a class-action lawsuit was filed against Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld on behalf of more than 1,000 residents of the Armed Forces Retirement Home in our nation's capital.

The complaint of the plaintiffs -- whose average age is 76 and whose average term of service is more than 20 years in the military -- is that Rumsfeld is responsible for "drastic cuts" in their medical services.

The lawsuit, Cody et al. vs. Rumsfeld, was filed last week in federal district court in Washington. It demanded that Rumsfeld restore all the medical benefits that have been reduced or eliminated.

It states that during the last two years, in the name of cost-cutting by the Defense Department, the veterans at the old soldiers home have faced the closure of the facility's primary treatment room with its 24/7 physician on duty; closure of the on-site pharmacy; elimination of on-site X-ray services; a shortage of even basic medical supplies; and elimination of mortuary services.

The final blow seemingly was the announcement that Rumsfeld had included nearby Walter Reed Army Medical Center on the list of facilities to be shut down and done away with under the Base Realignment and Closure process.

The lawsuit says the old veterans were promised "a model retirement community" when they moved in and were told that, under the law, the Defense Department was required to provide residents with "high-quality, on-site medical and dental care."

It says with the closure of the primary treatment room, anyone needing medical care after 4 p.m. has limited options: a phone consultation with a nurse or an emergency call to 911. Should an emergency require off-site treatment, the residents are required to pay for transportation.

With closure of the on-site pharmacy and X-ray facilities, the veterans are sent to Walter Reed for their pills and pictures. When that closes, they say, they will have to travel farther to commercial facilities.

Homer Rutherford, a retiree with 23 years' service on Air Force medical evacuation flights in Europe, Korea and Vietnam, said: "The residents are extremely upset and, quite frankly, confused by this treatment. We feel betrayed."

Steve McManus, financial officer of the retirement home, said that changes had been made in medical and dental services for the veterans, but he declared that the changes are for the better.

He confirmed that pharmacy services are now contracted out, but he said that when a doctor writes a prescription for one of the veterans, it is phoned to the contractor, who delivers it during three-times-a-week deliveries. He added that in the past, inspectors had criticized the home for failings in its pharmacy operations.

McManus said five physicians' assistants' jobs had been eliminated, but two nurse practitioners work in their place, and four full-time physicians are available. "You know, four doctors for 1,000 patients isn't all that bad now, is it?"

Maybe so, but it sure is hard to look good when old veterans started calling you Scrooge and mistake your carefully thought-out "alignment and adjustment" for penny-pinching. The government isn't going to win this one, public-relations-wise. No way.

The Armed Forces Retirement Home in Washington is one of two operated under the auspices of the Defense Department. The other is located in Gulfport, Miss.

Ninety-five percent of the retirees served in a combat theater.

The Bush administration and the Defense Department have had their problems in the past with the nation's veterans, and they seem only to be getting worse.

Veterans groups complain that the new chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Republican Rep. Steve Buyer of Indiana, wants to cut Veterans Administration health care and disability benefits for many of the veterans whom the VA begged to enroll only a few years ago.

Buyer says VA health care should focus on indigent veterans and veterans whose disabilities are due to combat injuries. Annual fees for enrolling in VA health care for everyone are being increased.

The fact that the Republican caucus threw out a friend of veterans -- Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J. -- and installed the blunt-spoken Buyer in his place didn't make the Republican Party a lot of new friends among veterans.

The lawsuit against the administration by folks in the old soldiers' home is just the finishing touch.

Additional Notes