

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

July 19, 2005

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Department of Defense Releases

Defense Officials Answer BRAC List Questions

American Forces Press Service
Sgt. 1st Class Doug Sample
July 18, 2005

WASHINGTON— Defense Department leaders appeared today before the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to explain why certain military facilities were not included among Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's May 13 recommendations.

Commissioners were back here to continue their deliberations after visiting military bases around the country in recent weeks being considered for closure or realignment.

Michael Wynne, deputy undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, provided details on several bases in question.

Wynne said Marine Corps Recruiting Depot San Diego, one of two maintained by the Corps - the other is at Parris Island, S.C. - was considered but not recommended for closure because closing the center would compromise the Corps' "geocentric recruiting, shipping and recruit training command and control."

Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. William L. Nyland agreed, arguing that the

Marine Corps, despite being the smallest military force, needs two training sites because it "recruits more men and women per percentage of total force than any of the other services."

"We have to have a steady flow of these great young men and women to support the Marines' combat forces. Having two depots allows that," he said.

The general also added "the return on our investment would not be realized for over 100 years" if the service had only a single recruit depot.

Commission members also questioned why Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard was left off the secretary's list.

Wynne said the facility was among four naval shipyards analyzed for closure, but added military judgment favored keeping the base open because of its "strategic location and multiplatform capabilities." Other Navy facilities scrutinized by the commission included the Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine, and the Broadway Complex in San Diego.

Wynne said consideration was given to close the Brunswick base completely. However, the base was kept open due to its strategic presence in the northeastern United States and for its surge capabilities.

The Broadway Complex, he explained, "is in the right location to best service the fleet within the San Diego confines."

Wynne said the Navy also examined alternatives for an East Coast master jet base. The decision was between Moody Air Force Base, Ga., appeared as a "feasible alternative," he said, but the base had a number of factors that made it less desirable, including "significant one-time military construction costs." The Navy decided to retain Naval Air Station Oceana, Va., because it was the "most suitable option," Wynne noted.

He said the department had considered building a new 21st Century master jet base, but such

action would occur "outside the BRAC window and BRAC timeframe."

Added Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Robert F. Willard, "Moody is a World War II vintage air base. About a half billion dollars in military construction would be required there."

"Sharing Moody with the Air Force with the inability to bring the entire wing from Oceana there is not a cost effective alternative," he said.

In addition, the admiral pointed out Oceana provides a significant advantage because it's close to the naval fleet berthed in nearby Norfolk Va. "We felt strongly that any alternative would have to continue to serve the fleet from a military-value standpoint effectively," he said.

Air Force Gen. T. Michael Moseley, recently confirmed as the next Air Force chief of staff, explained the Defense Department's decision to retain Moody was a good decision. He said Moody, near the Army's Infantry Center at Fort Benning, Ga., will allow battlefield and expeditionary combat airmen to partner with land component forces better, and "to maximize warfighting capabilities and jointness."

Wynne told the commission that "jointness was a key goal" to many of Rumsfeld's recommendations on which bases to close or realigned. For example, he said Pope Air Force Base, N.C., was realigned rather than closed in order to support relocation of Forces Command headquarters there from Fort McPherson, Ga.

He said the air base will allow for joint training opportunities between Air Force and Army personnel and provide the airlift for troops stationed at adjacent Fort Bragg, N.C.

Meanwhile, Wynne said Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D., another base the department wants to keep open, was realigned rather than closed to ensure continued strategic presence in the north-central United States and to support the department's emerging unmanned aerial vehicle mission.

Wynne told the commission the secretary's recommendations will make the department "stronger, more capable and more effective."

He added the department will make sure that the final recommendations are "fair, and consistent with the selection criterion and force structure plan and will in fact increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our military infrastructure."

Rumsfeld recommended closing 33 major bases and realigning 29 other major bases out of a total of 318 bases. The nine-member commission panel must send its recommendations on closures and realignments to the president by Sept. 8.

The president will have until Sept. 23 to accept or reject the recommendations in their entirety. If accepted, Congress will have 45 legislative days to reject the recommendations in their entirety or they become binding on the department.

Rumsfeld Presses Wynne To Manage BRAC; Air Force Secretary Next?

Inside the Navy
Jason Sherman
July 18, 2005

Michael Wynne, the former Pentagon acquisition chief, has been pressed back into service for the summer to oversee the Defense Department's base realignment and closure efforts, according to Pentagon sources.

At the behest of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Wynne scuttled plans to leave the Pentagon in late June, returning to a post he previously held -- principal deputy under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, according to Pentagon officials.

By keeping Wynne in the Pentagon, Rumsfeld may have his eye on more than just a BRAC point man, sources say: Wynne's name is being floated for the vacant position of Air Force secretary. Keeping Wynne active in a senior Pentagon position could make it easier for him

to garner Senate approval for another slot, a source said.

"This keeps him in the building," said an official.

Senate approval, however, may be a challenge given Wynne's role in the Pentagon's controversial, and now defunct, bid to lease aerial refueling tankers for the Air Force from Boeing. The Defense Department's inspector general in May singled out Wynne, along with four other executives, as a major player in the flawed lease deal.

Wynne, a former executive at General Dynamics, became principal deputy under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics in July 2001. In May 2003 he was named acting under secretary for the same office and this spring was given the full under secretary title.

For now, Wynne's portfolio is limited to the BRAC Commission process.

"Even though he is [the principal deputy under secretary of defense], he has taken the mantle of all issues BRAC," said a Pentagon official.

While the Defense Department presented its list of facilities it says should be closed or realigned, Pentagon officials still must consult regularly with the independent commission, which will present a final list of bases to be shuttered or realigned to the White House in September.

Wynne continues to chair the Pentagon's Infrastructure Steering Committee, which he oversaw as the acquisition czar, and is scheduled to testify before the BRAC Commission on July 18, according to Glenn Flood, a Pentagon spokesman.

Fight Over Navy OLF Highlights Hurdles To DoD Facility Expansions

Inside the Navy
Alex Kuli
July 18, 2005

At a time when communities are struggling to prevent the Defense Department from shutting down local bases in the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, environmentalists' efforts to stop the Navy from constructing a new landing field in North Carolina illustrate the hurdles DOD also faces in expanding some of its facilities.

On July 20, the Navy will ask the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit to quash a lower court decision in *National Audubon Society, et al. v. Department of the Navy* that has halted all work on its outlying landing field (OLF) in North Carolina's Washington and Beaufort counties. The Navy argues that constructing an OLF at that site is critically important for national security, and that it never violated any environmental laws in siting the project. U.S. District Court Judge Terrence Boyle disagrees. On Feb. 18, he ruled that the Navy blatantly violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when it sited its OLF next to the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, a winter haven for snow geese and tundra swans and other migratory birds.

NEPA requires federal agencies to objectively evaluate a project's environmental consequences before commencing. But Boyle found the Navy had "reverse engineered" the process by choosing its OLF site first, then conducting an environmental impact statement (EIS) that minimized the risk to both the birds and the pilots that might collide with them. He imposed a permanent injunction until the Navy remedied these errors.

A source with the environmentalist plaintiffs said if the 4th Circuit reverses Boyle's decision, it will set a precedent allowing national security to trump environmental law. "It basically gives carte blanche to anything [the military] wants to label 'national security,'" a source with the National Audubon Society's North Carolina office says.

Opposition to the OLF has galvanized a broad coalition of environmentalists, farmers, members of Congress and others. The group

held a July 13 press conference to demand that Congress to take measures to stop it.

But in a May 31 brief to the 4th Circuit, Navy attorneys say every day of delay in OLF construction harms fleet readiness. The region's sparsely populated wilderness closely replicates the atmosphere of the open seas at night, making it an ideal spot for Navy pilots to practice landing the new F/A-18E/F model Super Hornets on aircraft carriers. They say harm to the wildlife refuge would be "mitigable and minor."

Plaintiffs counter that the Navy's true intention is to flout NEPA in order to satisfy political objectives that have nothing to do with national security. Rather, the Navy wants to create a training area away from the naval air base in Oceana, VA, where most of the Super Hornets are to be based. Reducing aircraft noise around Oceana is a key goal of Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Warner (R-VA), who has pledged to support the Navy's OLF decision, plaintiffs say. The 4th Circuit "should not be so easily fooled into letting alleged 'need' bleed over into the merits of this case," the plaintiffs' June 28 brief states.

But outside analysts suggest the environmentalists are facing an uphill battle. They note Boyle has an unusually high rate of reversals. According to a study by People for the American Way, a group that opposes Boyle's pending nomination to the appellate bench, the 4th Circuit reversed approximately 12 percent of Boyle's decisions upon appeal from 1992-2002. The average rate for all other judges at the 4th Circuit is 7.5 percent during the same time period, the study found.

Also, the likely composition of the panel does not bode well for the environmentalists, analysts say. While the 4th Circuit does not reveal the panel of judges until the day of the trial, a source in the clerk's office indicates it will likely be the same panel that heard a related Navy OLF appeal on Feb. 1: Judges J. Harvie Wilkinson III and Karen Williams, both appointed by Republican presidents; and William Traxler, appointed by President Bill Clinton.

A 2004 study by the nonpartisan Environmental Law Institute found that in NEPA appeals cases between 2001 and 2004, Republican-majority panels rule in favor of environmental plaintiffs only 10 percent of the time. By contrast, Democrat-majority panels favored environmental plaintiffs 58 percent of the time, while all-Democrat panels found for environmentalists in 75 percent of cases.

Moreover, legal observers say Wilkinson, who dominated the Feb. 1 OLF hearing, has a history of deferring to federal government decisions in both environmental and military matters. In *Gibbs v. Babbitt* (2000), Wilkinson affirmed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's right to enforce provisions of the Endangered Species Act on private property. In *Rumsfeld v. Hamdi* (2003), Wilkinson declined to intervene in the Bush administration's decision to detain Yaser Hamdi as an enemy combatant without trial, citing the primacy of national security. "The ingredients essential to military success -- its planning, tactics and intelligence -- are beyond our ken, and the courtroom is a poor vantage point for the breadth of comprehension that is required to conduct a military campaign on foreign soil," Wilkinson wrote.

Wilkinson cited similar national security concerns in the Feb. 1 OLF hearing. He worried that enjoining the OLF project over alleged NEPA violations would weaken training for Navy pilots, who are currently fighting a war in which aircraft carriers play a critical role, he said. "I am wary about using a procedural statute to second-guess a matter of national security," he said. "If people are going to risk their lives, don't we owe them training that will approximate actual wartime conditions?"

However, a NEPA attorney who is not involved in the OLF case suggested the environmentalists have a solid chance despite the probable political disposition of the panel.

"The most salient thing about the case so far is that plaintiffs have gotten a U.S. District judge to agree with their position, to the point of issuing a permanent injunction," the attorney

said. "Those three judges . . . will want to start by asking themselves what prompted Judge Boyle to rule as he did."

In his ruling, Boyle found the Navy EIS had utterly failed to take a "hard look" at the environmental impacts of the OLF in Washington and Beaufort counties -- a key requirement of NEPA.

"Although the Navy's failure to comply with NEPA is established by its inadequate environmental analysis, the selective examination of data and strained conclusions in the [final EIS] are more understandable when considered in light of the Navy's need to support a pre-ordained determination that a new OLF would be constructed at [the Washington/Beaufort site]," he wrote.

The NEPA attorney expects this strong language will play in the environmentalists' favor at the 4th Circuit hearing. "That is about as much of a scolding as you'll ever hear from a federal judge," the attorney said. Boyle also found the Navy's national security arguments unpersuasive, saying current training facilities are adequate. "Neither the [Navy] nor the law posit that the interest of military training invalidates federal law," he wrote.

"Upon a full review of the record, it is apparent the national security interests at stake may still be protected, while at the same time first assuring that the Navy takes the time and makes the effort to recognize and consider the effects of their proposed action on the environment," Boyle wrote.

But Boyle added that if the Navy satisfies NEPA's mandates, and the Washington/Beaufort site remains the optimal choice, it will be free to construct its OLF. On June 24, the Navy announced it was conducting a supplemental EIS examining five different potential OLF sites in North Carolina.

At the same time, the Navy will try to persuade the 4th Circuit that Boyle's ruling was fraught with fundamental errors. In their May 31 legal brief, the Navy's attorneys attacked Boyle for

basing his decision upon evidence that was outside the administrative record, and did not even exist when the Navy prepared its EIS. "That approach is flatly inconsistent with the principle that judicial review of an agency's decision is based on the evidence before the agency at the time the decision was made, not materials received after the decision," the Navy's brief states.

The Navy also contends Boyle inappropriately tried to evaluate whether the Navy had used the best scientific methodology in assessing the OLF's impact on the waterfowl. "NEPA merely prohibits uninformed -- rather than unwise -- agency action," the Navy brief states, citing case law.

Moreover, Boyle took an improper approach to evaluating the Navy's EIS. "Rather than evaluate the adequacy of the Navy's analysis as a whole as a reviewing court is supposed to do, [Boyle] took a piecemeal approach, fly-specking and identifying alleged deficiencies in each component of the Navy's analysis."

Finally, the Navy concludes that even if it had committed a NEPA violation, the permanent injunction is overly broad, harming both the Navy and the American public. "Given the improved training for Naval aviators that the new OLF will provide. . . the public's interest clearly does not favor the district court's injunction."

National News Articles

Panel Has Reservations About Base Closings

Washington Post
Liz Soditi
July 18, 2005

WASHINGTON -- The base-closing commission expressed deep reservations Monday about parts of the Pentagon's proposal to restructure domestic military bases, including its plan to disband or move dozens of Air National Guard units.

On the eve of a vote by the commission on whether to add about a dozen facilities to those the Defense Department has proposed closing or shrinking, panel members questioned why several were left off the list. These included the Naval Shipyard at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego.

The skepticism exhibited by members of the independent commission at a hearing was an indication that they won't rubber-stamp Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's proposal as some in Congress had feared.

In May, Rumsfeld proposed closing or reducing forces at 62 major bases and hundreds of smaller installations to save money and streamline the services.

Commission Chairman Anthony Principi has pledged to analyze the list independently and make changes if needed before sending it to President Bush for approval this fall.

"We want to make sure the best possible closure or realignment choices are made," Principi said. "It is not our intent to disrupt or to unreasonably target communities that may have breathed a sigh of relief in May when the secretary's list of recommendations was released, or to further burden communities already facing losses."

After voting Tuesday on whether to add certain bases to the Pentagon's list, the nine-member commission will conduct public hearings, visit the sites and collect data to make direct comparisons with bases that perform similar missions and are slated for closure.

It takes votes from seven of nine commission members to add a base to the list on Tuesday. The commission then will have to reaffirm that decision in August, with seven of nine votes. Other bases on the Pentagon's list can be removed at that time by five of nine votes.

For their part, defense officials who testified Monday discouraged changes to Rumsfeld's list of proposed closures and consolidations.

Michael Wynne, the Pentagon's technology and weapons-buying chief who oversaw the base restructuring project, said, "While the department stands behind its recommendations, it fully supports the commission and analysis of alternatives."

However, Wynne then reiterated Rumsfeld's contention that changing the fate of even one base could disrupt other aspects of the "comprehensive, integrated and interdependent" package of recommendations.

Commissioners appeared unlikely to heed that warning.

Nearly every commissioner questioned the Pentagon's proposal to scrap or shift roughly 30 Air National Guard units by taking away the planes or the missions. By law, governors, through their adjutants general, command Guard forces during statewide emergencies like civil disturbances, floods, hurricanes or forest fires.

State officials complain that Rumsfeld can't legally move the units without the governors' consent, and Pennsylvania officials have filed a lawsuit over the issue. The Justice Department is reviewing the matter, and defense officials have asked the commission to refrain from changing Rumsfeld's Air National Guard recommendations until that ruling.

"The commission believes a solution is needed," Principi said.

One proposal being floated Monday would ensure that each state has at least one Air National Guard flying unit. The proposal was seen by some lobbyists as a way to mollify adjutants general.

Harold Gehman, a commissioner and a retired Navy admiral, called the Air National Guard proposals "unworkable and unsatisfactory."

Several others, including Principi, questioned whether Rumsfeld's recommendations would hamper homeland security duties or create recruiting problems.

Commissioner Philip Coyle, a former assistant secretary of defense, said of the recommendations, "They produce very little savings."

Defense officials said the benefits of consolidating the Guard units to achieve a more cohesive force outweigh the drawbacks.

Commission members also questioned the Pentagon's decision to close the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, instead of the Naval Shipyard at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, given Portsmouth's reputation for quickly repairing submarines.

And, they pressed for an explanation for why the Pentagon decided to leave open the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego _ when the Marines already have a recruiting station at Parris Island, S.C., and the other services have consolidated their recruit-training facilities.

"I'm having a hard time getting my hands around this," said commissioner James Hansen, a former Utah congressman.

Panel Mulls Adding Bases to Closure List

New York Times
July 19, 2005

WASHINGTON (AP) -- U.S. military bases spared in the spring from the Pentagon's list of proposed closures or downsizings aren't off the hook yet.

The commission charged with reviewing Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's plan to restructure domestic military bases is to vote Tuesday on whether to add about a dozen facilities to his list.

"We want to make sure the best possible closure or realignment choices are made," Commission Chairman Anthony Principi said Monday at a hearing where the commission expressed deep reservations about several parts of Rumsfeld's plan.

"It is not our intent to disrupt or to unreasonably target communities that may have breathed a sigh of relief in May when the secretary's list of recommendations was released, or to further burden communities already facing losses," Rumsfeld said.

Rather, he said, adding bases to the list would allow the commission to conduct public hearings, visit the sites and collect data to make direct comparisons with bases that perform similar missions and are slated for closure.

In May, Rumsfeld proposed closing or reducing forces at 62 major bases and hundreds of smaller installations to save money and streamline the services. It's the first round of base closures in a decade.

It takes votes from seven of nine commission members to add a base to the list. The commission then will have to reaffirm that decision in August, with seven of nine votes. Other bases on the Pentagon's list can be removed at that time with five of nine votes.

Over the past two months, the commission has toured bases on Rumsfeld's list and has held regional hearings to give communities a chance to argue why their bases should be spared. Commissioners have been lobbied by congressional delegations as well as professionals hired by states to save their bases.

On Monday, panel members pressed defense officials on the Pentagon's plan to disband or move dozens of Air National Guard units, questioning expected savings and the impact on recruitment and homeland defense capabilities.

One proposal being floated Monday would ensure that each state has at least one Air National Guard flying unit. The proposal was seen by some lobbyists as a way to mollify adjutants general.

Commissioners also pressed defense officials on why several bases were left off the list. These included the Naval Shipyard at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego.

And, commissioners questioned Pentagon decisions to scale back drastically operations, rather than close, the Naval Air Station in Brunswick, Maine, Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina, and Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota.

The skepticism was an indication that commissioners don't plan to rubber-stamp the proposal as some in Congress had feared. Principi has pledged to analyze the list independently and make changes if needed before sending it to President Bush for approval this fall.

For their part, defense officials who testified Monday discouraged changes to Rumsfeld's list of proposed closures and consolidations.

Michael Wynne, the Pentagon's technology and weapons-buying chief who oversaw the base restructuring project, said, "While the department stands behind its recommendations, it fully supports the commission and analysis of alternatives."

However, Wynne then reiterated Rumsfeld's contention that changing the fate of even one base could disrupt other aspects of the "comprehensive, integrated and interdependent" package of recommendations.

Commission has reservations about base-closing proposal

USA Today
July 18, 2005

A panel examining proposed base closings expressed major reservations Monday about the Pentagon's plan to restructure the nation's military bases, including moves that would cost more than 1,000 jobs in Missouri.

The BRAC Commission is scheduled to vote Tuesday on whether to add Pearl Harbor and other bases to the Pentagon's list of proposed closings.

Bill Clark, Gannett News Service

Nearly every member of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission questioned the proposal to reorganize or close dozens of Air National Guard units around the country. That could help Missouri's effort to save about 250 jobs at the Guard's 131st Fighter Wing in St. Louis, which have been on the chopping block since May.

Harold Gehman, a commissioner and a retired Navy admiral, called the Air National Guard proposals "unworkable and unsatisfactory."

Several others, including commission chairman Anthony Principi, questioned whether Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's recommendations would hamper homeland security duties or create recruiting problems. Those are the same arguments Missouri's congressional delegation has made against closing the 131st Fighter Wing.

State officials complain that Rumsfeld can't legally move the units without governors' consent. Pennsylvania officials have filed a lawsuit over the issue and Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt is considering legal action.

Defense officials defended the plan, saying the benefits of consolidating Guard units to achieve a more cohesive force outweighed the drawbacks.

Meanwhile, commission member James Bilbray raised questions about plans to close more than 20 defense accounting offices around the country. That move would shed about 900 jobs at two Defense Finance and Accounting Service offices in St. Louis and Kansas City that have been targeted for closure and consolidation with offices in Indianapolis, Denver and Columbus, Ohio.

While Bilbray did not mention the Missouri offices, he questioned whether shifting the accounting service to other regions is financially justified.

"In this particular case there may be some efficiencies, but the fact is it's cheaper to run

these DFAS facilities in some of these outlying areas," said Bilbray.

Lawmakers who represent areas that would lose jobs, like Missouri, New York and Ohio, say the three facilities would need major new office space to accommodate the work.

Bilbray said the proposed consolidation would likely lead to expensive new construction to accommodate the greater number of DFAS workers, who handle the military's payroll and accounting responsibilities.

"The fact is that if you consolidate them all I question whether there will be any real efficiencies, sizable efficiencies," said Bilbray. "It's going to cost you a lot of money."

Michael Wynne, defense undersecretary for acquisition, technology and logistics, insisted the DFAS changes would not require any expensive new construction.

"We can't afford not to do BRAC," Wynne said. "We have got to come up with the resources to make this department more efficient. We need to get ahead of that curve."

BRAC members will decide Tuesday whether to add more bases to the Pentagon's initial list of those slated for closure or consolidation. The commission will then submit its closure plan to President Bush in September. The commission's work must be approved by the president and Congress. The bases could include:

- Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego.
- Naval Shipyard Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.
- Navy Broadway Complex, San Diego.
- Naval Master Jet Base, Naval Air Station Oceana, Va.
- Galena Airport Forward Operating Location, Alaska.
- Pope Air Force Base, N.C.

- Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D.

- Defense Finance Accounting Services: Buckley Annex, Colo.; Columbus, Ohio; Indianapolis.

- Professional Development Education: Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, Calif.; Defense Language Institute, Monterey, Calif.; Air Force Institute of Technology at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

- Joint Medical Command Headquarters: Navy Bureau of Medicine, Potomac Annex, Washington, D.C.; Air Force Medical Command, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C.; TRICARE Management Authority, Va.; Office of the Army Surgeon General, Va.

- The commission also has raised questions about proposed consolidations of Air National Guard units. About 30 are already on the list.

BRAC Votes Today On Adding Installations To This Round

Congress Daily
July 19, 2005
Megan Scully

The Base Closure and Realignment Commission will vote today on whether to consider closing several installations spared two months ago by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld.

The nine-member independent panel will not make any firm decisions on whether to close facilities during today's public hearing on Capitol Hill, but the meeting will give lawmakers and communities an indication of which bases the commission might add to the lengthy list of recommendations Rumsfeld released in May.

"It is not our intent to disrupt or to unreasonably target communities that may have breathed a sigh of relief in May ... or to further burden communities already facing losses," BRAC Chairman Anthony Principi said Monday.

However, the commission must weigh other options to Rumsfeld's list to make a "fair

assessment" of which installations should be closed, Principi said.

Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard is among the largest installations the commission is expected to vote on during today's hearing. The Pentagon passed over the multi-functional repair and maintenance facility during its BRAC analysis because of its strategic location in the Pacific.

Instead, the Pentagon opted to shut the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine -- a decision commissioners fear might ultimately tie up repairs on the aging fleet.

The Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego might be another target for closure as the commission weighs whether the service needs a major recruit training facility on each coast. The facility falls in the district of House Armed Services Chairman Hunter, who has vowed to fight to shield it from this BRAC round.

Unlike the Air Force and Navy, which have only one recruit depot apiece, the Marines maintain the San Diego facility and a similar installation at Parris Island, S.C. The Marine Corps has contended that it needs a recruiting depot on each coast to reach its goal of about 17,000 new enlistees each year.

"I don't think we can afford to have a single point of failure," Gen. William Nyland, assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, said during a hearing Monday. "We need a steady flow of men and women."

Today's votes will help the commission narrow its options as it nears the end of its work. On Aug. 21, commissioners will meet to mark up their recommendations, which they will forward to the White House by Sept. 8.

Seven out of the nine commissioners must ultimately agree to add a base to the final list. In previous BRAC rounds during the 1990s, the commission needed only a simple majority. Still, the panel's final recommendations largely resembled the Defense secretary's list.

With less than two months until this BRAC-analysis round concludes, the commission still has a number of outstanding questions for the Bush administration, including cost and savings estimates, the economic impact of closure decisions, and environmental and cleanup issues, Principi told reporters.

Also outstanding is whether the Defense Department has the authority to remove all

aircraft from state-run Guard units. Principi said he is awaiting word from the Justice Department on that issue and expects it before the markup next month.

Base closing commission skeptical of some Pentagon plans

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Washington DC)
Sam Hananel
July 18, 2005

A panel examining proposed base closings expressed major reservations Monday about the Pentagon's plan to restructure the nation's military bases, including moves that would cost more than 1,000 jobs in Missouri.

Nearly every member of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission questioned the proposal to reorganize or close dozens of Air National Guard units around the country. That could help Missouri's effort to save about 250 jobs at the Guard's 131st Fighter Wing in St. Louis, which have been on the chopping block since May.

Harold Gehman, a commissioner and a retired Navy admiral, called the Air National Guard proposals "unworkable and unsatisfactory."

Several others, including commission chairman Anthony Principi, questioned whether Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's recommendations would hamper homeland security duties or create recruiting problems. Those are the same arguments Missouri's congressional delegation has made against closing the 131st Fighter Wing.

State officials complain that Rumsfeld can't legally move the units without governors' consent. Pennsylvania officials have filed a lawsuit over the issue and Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt is considering legal action.

Defense officials defended the plan, saying the benefits of consolidating Guard units to achieve a more cohesive force outweighed the drawbacks.

Meanwhile, commission member James Bilbray raised questions about plans to close more than 20 defense accounting offices around the country. That move would shed about 900 jobs at two Defense Finance and Accounting Service offices in St. Louis and Kansas City that have been targeted for closure and consolidation with offices in Indianapolis, Denver and Columbus, Ohio.

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"The fact is that if you consolidate them all I question whether there will be any real efficiencies, sizable efficiencies," said Bilbray. "It's going to cost you a lot of money."

Michael Wynne, defense undersecretary for acquisition, technology and logistics, insisted the DFAS changes would not require any expensive new construction.

"We can't afford not to do BRAC," Wynne said. "We have got to come up with the resources to make this department more efficient. We need to get ahead of that curve."

BRAC members will decide Tuesday whether to add more bases to the Pentagon's initial list of those slated for closure or consolidation. The commission will then submit its closure plan to

President Bush in September. The commission's work must be approved by the president and Congress.

BRAC panel questions proposed Air Guard changes

Copley News Service
Otto Kreisher
July 18, 2005

Members of the base realignment and closure commission Monday sharply questioned the proposed deep cuts in Air National Guard flying units and indicated they might reject the recommendations if they are not changed.

The commissioners were particularly concerned about the possible impact on Air Guard recruiting, the weakening of homeland security and the governors' ability to respond to crises in their states if the aircraft are removed from so many Guard units.

One of the units that would be affected is the 183rd Fighter Wing at the Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport in Springfield, which would lose its F-16 fighters. Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich has threatened to sue to block the move, which he insists requires his approval under federal law.

Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell already has file suit to counter a similar Air Guard change in his state.

One commissioner, retired Adm. Harold Gehman, said he believed the Air Force's "unworkable and unsatisfactory" recommendations on the Air Guard "deviated substantially" from the BRAC rules, "misapplied military value, substituted military judgment when the numbers didn't work out right" and appeared to have violated several laws and defense policies.

The commission is required to reject any of the Pentagon's recommendations if it concludes that the proposed changes "deviate substantially" from the criteria set out in the BRAC legislation.

Although none of the eight other commissioners was as harsh in their judgment as Gehman, nearly all of them expressed concern about the proposed Air Guard realignments, which constituted a majority of the significant changes in Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's recommendations.

Chairman Anthony J. Principi said the commissioners have heard a lot of complaints about the Air Guard issue during their base visits and regional hearings.

Those complaints included protests from the adjutants general, the top Guard officer in each state, that they were not consulted on the proposed changes to their units.

"The issues raised are a concern to us as well," Principi said.

He told the Pentagon witnesses, which included senior Air Force and Air Guard officers, they should be aware "that the commission believes a solution is needed."

But just to reject all of Rumsfeld's recommendations affecting the Air Guard "would be irresponsible," Principi added. He urged the Pentagon officials to work with the governors and the adjutants general to develop "a solution that serves the best interests of national security and the country."

Michael Wynne, who had supervised the Defense Department's BRAC selection process, said Pentagon officials believe all their recommendations, including those affecting the National Guard, are in accordance "with all applicable laws" and are consistent with actions taken in the previous base closure rounds.

He noted that the commissioners had asked the attorney general for a legal opinion and urged them not to make any decision on the Air Guard changes until they received that opinion.

Several authorities have told the commission that the federal law cited by the governors does not apply to the BRAC process.

The top Air Force witness, Lt. Gen. Stephen Wood, said the removal of aircraft from so many Air Guard units was necessary because of an overall reduction in the number of planes, particularly the F-16s, and the need to consolidate the remaining aircraft into more efficient-size squadrons.

Illinois would benefit from that consolidation with additional aircraft and personnel moved to Scott Air Force Base.

Wood and Lt. Gen. Daniel James, director of the Air Guard, acknowledged that the adjutants general were not consulted in detail on proposed changes to their units, but had been briefed repeatedly over recent years on the Air Force's plans to reduce and consolidate its aircraft.

James agreed with the commissioners that removing aircraft from units could hurt recruiting and retention. But he said the "exciting new missions" that will be created at those former flying units could be attractive to other people.

Commissioner James Bilbray said they had heard complaints that the Air Guard changes would take away aircraft used to fight forest fires. But Wood noted that all four bases around the country that have the air tanker aircraft used in fire fighting will gain aircraft, which are sent wherever they are needed.

A number of commissioners repeated complaints they had heard that the cuts and relocations of aircraft would hurt homeland security by leaving regions without fighter protection.

But Maj. Gen. Scott Mayes, commander of all Air Force units dedicated to homeland defense, said the Air Guard changes had been approved by Adm. Timothy Keating, commander of the U.S. Northern Command, which is responsible for defense of the nation.

Officials call on Pentagon to close more bases

Scripps Howard News Service
Lawrence M. O'Rourke

July 18, 2005

The Pentagon's plan to shut down and consolidate U.S. military bases at home and overseas could cost taxpayers about as much as the Defense Department hopes to save, members of the independent base-closure commission said Monday.

Top military officials told the commission that base closures such as the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, and changes such as downsizing Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina were needed and acceptable. But expanding the base-closure list could jeopardize the nation's ability to deter terrorism or prepare for future wars, they warned.

The Pentagon's short list of closures and realignments drew criticism from David M. Walker, head of the Government Accountability Office.

Walker warned during a Capitol Hill hearing that Pentagon spending is contributing to a growing financial instability in the United States. He encouraged the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to expand the list of closures and realignments to save larger amounts of money.

Walker said that the base closing and alignment proposals put forth by the Pentagon might save \$50 billion over 20 years, but that the price of the changes would be at least \$24 billion. Walker said the actual cost of closing the bases, moving their functions and personnel elsewhere, and restoring the environment at the base sites could consume even higher amounts of projected savings.

Commission members suggested that they favor deeper cuts than the Pentagon has suggested, including merging the Marine Corps basic training camps in southern California and Parris Island, S.C., into one complex.

They also raised questions about the Navy's decision to maintain the Naval Shipyard at Pearl Harbor, rather than move its functions to Navy

shipyards at Norfolk, Kittery, Maine, and Puget Sound, Wash.

Walker was skeptical about the Pentagon's decision to close the Portsmouth shipyard in Kittery. He noted that the action would result in the "expected loss of skilled personnel associated with maintaining nuclear-powered submarines." He said the Navy has acknowledged that it takes eight years to develop those skills and that the skills will be needed at other shipyards.

Without resolving any issue, the commission and Pentagon officials discussed the Pentagon's recommendation of a package of closings and downsizing. The Defense Department said the package would result in closing 33 major bases and changing missions at 29 others.

The military officers who testified before the commission Monday raised problems with a variety of proposed moves, contending, for example, that merging the two Marine training depots would hurt recruitment of young Marines.

Some of the Pentagon witnesses also expressed concerns about the Pentagon's own proposals, including moving more than 4,000 jobs from Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina.

The witnesses pointed out that the cutbacks at Pope had to be considered with operations at adjacent Fort Bragg, which is to get 4,200 more jobs under the Pentagon's proposal. But the issue was given only passing reference Monday.

The Pentagon witnesses and commission members also discussed, without resolving, such issues as whether a realignment of Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota would hamper development of unmanned aircraft. They also explored complaints from state government officials that the re-allocation of aircraft, personnel, facilities and missions of Air National Guard facilities would hamper a governor's ability to call on guardsmen to deal with natural disasters.

The commission is to decide Tuesday whether the Pentagon's list for closures and realignments should be expanded.

Retired Gen. James Hill, a commission member, warned that the military should not be forced to close a facility that it might someday have to use.

"When we close these bases, we're not getting them back," Hill said.

Retired Gen. Keith Martin, also a commissioner, said it was the same with overseas bases.

"Once we leave those countries we're not going back," he said. "Later you might say I wish I had that."

Michael Wynne, a Defense Department technology and procurement official who headed the Pentagon team that produced its base-closing package, said that changes to part of the list could disrupt the "comprehensive, integrated and interdependent" approach presented by the military.

Members of the BRAC commission are working under a law enacted in 1990 to identify military installations that could be dropped or changed to save money.

Base Closure List May Be Revised BRAC Panel To Discuss Other Military Facilities

Hartford Courant (Hartford, CT)

Jesse Hamilton

July 19, 2005

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission is moving on to the final phase of its assignment to pick through the extensive list of military bases the Pentagon wants closed.

Today, the nine-member commission could demonstrate just how far it may stray from rubber-stamping the Pentagon's closure recommendations. It has scheduled a session to decide whether to add bases to its own version of the closure list, which would mark its first act

to make real changes to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's recommendations.

Adding a base to the closure list - which now includes 33 major bases - requires the approval of seven commission members. Those expected to come up for discussion today include facilities at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; San Diego; Brunswick, Maine; and a number of other bases and general military missions that escaped the Pentagon's net.

Defenders of the Naval Submarine Base in Groton - the largest recommended closure on Rumsfeld's list - don't think today will see major movement affecting Groton's status, but there have been other signs some view as positive.

The commission received a letter about the sub base from retired Adm. Bruce DeMars, former director of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program, that slams the Pentagon's listing of Groton.

It says the Navy used a skewed study of its future sub needs to make the decision to list Groton and didn't think about the hit on the neighboring submarine builder, Electric Boat.

"In the '90s, I encouraged Electric Boat to take over the maintenance activities at the submarine base," he wrote. "It has worked well and reduced overhead at Electric Boat some \$50 million per year. If the submarine base closes, this advantage is lost and the cost of new construction submarines will rise."

On Monday, the commission heard from Pentagon officials trying to convince it to leave the recommendations intact.

Meanwhile, officials from the U.S. Government Accountability Office presented a study on the Pentagon's performance in this ongoing BRAC round.

The study reinforced much of the Pentagon's procedure, but criticized a few major points. It found that almost half of the annual recurring savings the Pentagon estimated was from cutting jobs.

But while jobs would be cut from specific bases, the "end strength" of the military wouldn't be lowered to match.

So, every military member cut from a current task would just be reassigned somewhere else, leaving no real savings.

John Markowicz, chairman of the base-defending Subbase Realignment Coalition, called that finding "music to my ears." It echoed a point he was trying to make to the commission at a recent hearing in Boston.

The GAO study casts doubts on a number of other savings estimates and expresses concern about losing expert personnel in the process of moving highly technical work. It also names Groton specifically among the six communities whose employment bases would be hit hardest in the closures.

Connecticut advocates, led by Gov. M. Jodi Rell, sent a 300-page packet to the commission Monday detailing more pro-Groton arguments developed since the July 6 hearing before commission members in Boston.

"The materials demonstrate the weakness of [the Department of Defense's] military value and other arguments for closing the base, particularly those involving costs/savings," reads the executive summary.

Most of the new material relates to those overstated savings figures and understated costs associated with closing Groton's base, according to state officials.

It also details an environmental inspection of the base conducted by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Also Monday, U.S. Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., dropped by the Hartford Club to convey a message of optimism, tinged with a dire prediction. He told state business leaders he was hopeful about Groton's chances, and the hearing in Boston went well, but he said if the base

closes, the submarine factory just down the Thames River might follow.

"I think Electric Boat will probably close up," Dodd said. Company officials have repeatedly vowed Electric Boat will continue to do business in Groton, though those assurances haven't been backed with details.

The senator was confident that Connecticut's arguments got through to the commissioners. Even so, he said, "it is still a mountain to climb."

"The presumption is in favor of the Pentagon's recommendations," Dodd said. "You begin the day with that."

Groton advocates wait now for the commission's public deliberations on Connecticut's sub base, which haven't yet been scheduled.

"Every day we try to provide additional information in areas where we think they demonstrated interest," said Dodd, who added that he spoke to commission members on Sunday. "My sense was cost was a big issue to them," referring to the costs of moving the subs and facilities from Groton to Virginia and Georgia, and what he sees as an overestimation of savings from closing Groton.

Five of the nine commission members can take a base off the list.

Connecticut officials plan to meet soon with the BRAC commission's staff to go over their new collection of information.

Military Defends BRAC Plans

Fayetteville Observer
Henry Cuningham
July 19, 2005

WASHINGTON - A member of the BRAC commission questioned whether the Air Force could meet the airlift needs of Fort Bragg should the Pentagon's plan be enacted.

The commission member, retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd "Fig" Newton, posed the question during a hearing here Monday.

"Absolutely yes," said Gen. T. Michael Moseley, the Air Force vice chief of staff.

The Pentagon defended its proposals to close and realign military bases during the hearing before the independent commission.

The Base Realignment and Closure commission is the only body that can add or delete bases from the Pentagon's list.

The plan includes turning Pope Air Force Base over to Fort Bragg and relocating U.S. Army Forces Command, or FORSCOM, from Fort McPherson in Atlanta to the Bragg-Pope complex.

The plan calls for moving Pope's 43rd Airlift Wing to Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas.

The Pentagon's plan includes replacing the active-duty wing of C-130s at Pope with a smaller reserve squadron, which effectively would be a tenant on the expanded Army post.

Army troops board and cargo is loaded onto the Air Force airplanes at Pope's Green Ramp. The airplanes from Pope and other bases are used for local training missions and overseas deployments.

"The Army has continuous training requirements that go on day to day, outside of contingency tasking," Moseley said. "That joint training is a two-way street, not only for the individual jumping out of the airplane but for the individual who flies the airplane. We see no breaking down or detriment through the recommendations that are going to continue that partnership."

Newton asked about bringing to Pope planes for airborne exercises, rather than having aircraft permanently assigned to the base.

"The issue is the presence of the aircraft and the training opportunity," regardless of where the airplane is permanently assigned, Moseley said.

He said there is benefit in exposing more people to the 18th Airborne Corps and the 82nd Airborne.

Michael W. Wynne, chairman of the Infrastructure Steering Group, spoke on behalf of the Pentagon's May 13 plan.

"It supports the Army's plan for relocation of FORSCOM," Wynne said. "It maintains an airfield capability for the continuing Army presence at Fort Bragg, and it allows the Air Force and the Army to train together.

"It also fosters joint interaction. This allows efficient consolidation of installation management functions. The existing operational relationships will, in fact, continue, and, we believe, additional operational training synergies will emerge from these new relationships."

Hopes for Pope

The hearing gave little hope to Cumberland County officials who want the BRAC commission to reject the proposal and keep an active-duty airlift wing at Pope Air Force Base.

The commission at 1:30 p.m. today is scheduled to vote on whether to single out specific proposals for further study. The final vote will come the week of Aug. 22. The commission must send its report by Sept. 8 to the president, who can only accept or reject the entire plan.

The Pentagon's plan calls for bringing FORSCOM, a four-star headquarters, and U.S. Army Reserve Command, a three-star headquarters, to Pope.

Anthony Principi, who chairs the BRAC commission, in a letter July 1 asked the Pentagon why it wants to realign Pope rather than close it.

During the hearing, retired Army Gen. James T. Hill, one of nine commissioners, said the Army plans to build a headquarters on Fort Bragg, rather than Pope, for FORSCOM

"I think it has more to do with the preference, if you will, of the command structure of FORSCOM as to where they would like to be located than it has to do with the contiguous property," Wynne said.

Cumberland County officials have lobbied the BRAC commission to consider keeping the active-duty wing at Pope. They question whether Pope could maintain the same level of service as an Army airfield. They also say the Army does not have specialists - such as firefighters and munitions handlers - in many of the necessary areas to operate an Air Force airfield.

Retired Brig. Gen. Paul Dordal is working with Cumberland County officials to keep the wing at Pope. He was disappointed that the commissioners failed to focus more on the issues surrounding the base.

"They did ask some very pointed questions in some of the other areas, to include the Air National Guard realignment....," Dordal said after the hearing. "I was hoping that they would ask the same type of pointed questions about Pope Air Force Base, and that didn't happen. They asked very general questions, and the Air Force answered with some very not-unexpected answers that supported their position."

The proposal for Pope calls for stationing airplanes from the National Guard and Air Force Reserve at the base. State governors and adjutants general have criticized the Pentagon for trying to take away its airplanes through the BRAC process. The state officials said they were not informed or consulted. Air Force officials said they were.

Plane speaking

Retired Navy Adm. Harold Gehman criticized proposals in the BRAC process to move reserve airplanes. The plan, he said, is intended to address bases.

"It appears to violate several standing regulations and laws," Gehman said. "It appeared to have several hidden policy issues." The proposal, he said, would allow the active-

duty Air Force to "get better access to airplanes."

Wynne said the proposal to relocate A-10 attack jets from Pope Air Force Base to Moody Air Force Base in Georgia would provide opportunities to support the Army center at Fort Benning, Ga., the training site for infantry and armor.

An afternoon hearing with the Overseas Basing Commission raised doubts about a proposal to relocate an unidentified number of European-based forces to Fort Bragg. Between 61,000 and 70,000 troops would relocate to the United States.

The chairman, Al Cornella, said the moves come during a time of uncertainty over the availability of space at U.S. bases to house the troops and their families. There also is an uncertainty about the adequacy of airlift planes to deploy those forces in time of crisis. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have depleted pre-positioned war supplies that those troops would use, Cornella said.

Local News Articles

Shipyard apprentice may not be allowed to carry on his grandfather's tradition

Foster's Online (Dover, NH)

Eric Dolan

July 18, 2005

KITTERY — Steve Soucy's grandfather worked at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard for more than 20 years and retired there in the early 1980s.

Soucy wants to retire from the same shipyard as his grandfather, but with the yard facing possible closure as a result of Base Realignment and Closure recommendations, he's afraid his dream will go unfulfilled.

"It worries me," the 27-year-old, a recent graduate of the shipyard's apprentice program, said. "It's always in the back of my mind."

Soucy's grandfather worked at the shipyard as a radiation technologist.

Soucy works as a marine electrician, often spending time in tight spaces on submarines, overhauling the electrical components. He said it's a good thing he's not a big guy; it's not a job for the claustrophobic, he added.

Soucy graduated from New Hampshire Community Technical College in Laconia with his two-year technical degree four years ago. A friend mentioned to Soucy that he had gotten work at the shipyard and that the pay was great. Soucy decided to apply and graduated from his four-year apprenticeship in June.

He commutes to the shipyard from Wakefield, New Hampshire, every day.

While Soucy said he was not surprised to find out the shipyard was on the government's list for possible closure, as it has been on the list in the past, he hasn't yet made up his mind about what he would do if the government decides to close the facility.

"I'd like to stay in the area," he said. "I do like this area and I don't want to move."

Almost his entire family lives in this area, he noted.

"I have no plan of ever leaving if the shipyard stays," he said.

The electrician's biggest problem would be that his time working at the shipyard does not count toward his electrician's license "on the outside," as the work he does for the shipyard is different from regular electrical work. Given this, Soucy wouldn't want to look for a job anywhere else.

"I'd have to start over as an apprentice on the outside — that would be my only reason for not wanting to," he said.

According to Soucy, his favorite things about working at the navy yard are the hands-on work and the fact that no day is like the last. He said he works in different areas of the submarines on

different projects. He doesn't work on the same sub for more than 2 years at a time, he said, and shipyard employees are moved from one project to another often. That means he also works with a lot of different people.

"It's real good work and a lot of good people work there," he said. "I'd really hate to see it go."

Soucy has attended some of the rallies in support of the yard, he said, and at this point he tries to be optimistic about the facility's fate.

"I think in the end it's going to turn out positive," Soucy said. "At least I hope so."

N.M. lawmakers: Defense Department shows little concern for Cannon

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Cannon AFB, NM)
July 19, 2005

Members of New Mexico's congressional delegation are criticizing the Defense Department for its dismissal of assets at an eastern New Mexico base that has been targeted for closure by the Pentagon.

Cannon Air Force Base near Clovis is one of 33 major bases around the country the Pentagon has suggested closing. Pentagon officials testified during a hearing Monday before the independent Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

The New Mexico lawmakers claim the officials showed little concern about the air and test range space that would be lost if Cannon closes.

"Our job is cut out for us as the Pentagon fights to drop Cannon and keep its BRAC list as it was originally proposed," Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said Monday. "There is an obvious disconnect between the assets we know are available at Cannon and the Air Force's hard-nosed refusal to acknowledge them."

The delegation and state and Clovis leaders have argued intensely since the closure list was released in mid-May that Cannon has important

military value to the U.S. and should remain open. They've also claimed that flawed data was used to justify the base's closure.

Supporters contend Cannon is the only spot in the nation where airspace is increasing and it offers joint training possibilities with infantry and armor units at Fort Bliss and Fort Hood in neighboring Texas.

"Nothing in the Pentagon's testimony to the commission today alters our position that Cannon must remain open. ... We've delivered the message time and time again that closure just doesn't make sense and that Cannon has strategic value," said Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., added the delegation would continue meeting with BRAC commissioners, writing letters and making phone calls on behalf of Cannon.

The commission must send its recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8. He must approve the list in its entirety or send it back to the commission for more work.

Once Bush signs off on it, the list goes to Congress, which must accept it or reject it as a whole.

The Pentagon has estimated it would save \$2.7 billion over 20 years by closing Cannon, costing the base's 2,385 military employees and 384 civilian jobs and about 2,000 more indirect jobs.

The economic impact of the base has been estimated at \$200 million a year - about a third of the Clovis economy in a community of about 36,000.

Debate expands over Groton submarine base closing

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Washington DC)
Lolita C. Baldor
July 19, 2005

The base-closing commission on Monday peppered Defense Department officials with

questions about their proposal to close the submarine base in Groton, as a government study showed that cost savings from such moves have been exaggerated.

But Adm. Robert E. Willard, vice chief of naval operations, defended the decision to close Naval Submarine Base New London, saying that even with a force of 56 submarines there is enough room and repair structure at the four remaining submarine bases to handle the needed work.

Connecticut officials, who have been lobbying to get the base off the list of recommended closures, also sent a 300-page report to the commission Monday. In it, they laid out potential cost savings that could come from moving 11 attack submarines from Naval Station Norfolk to Groton.

Shifting vessels to Groton, they argued, could save between \$55 million and \$230 million over the next 20 years.

The cost estimates, which came in answer to questions from commissioners during a hearing in Boston earlier this month, show that "closing the (Groton) base would leave no other option but to downsize our submarine force," said Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn.

During the hearing Monday, members of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission questioned Pentagon officials about the size of the future submarine force and noted that once a base is closed it could not easily be rebuilt.

And they questioned the costs of moving vessels and personnel from Groton to Norfolk and to Kings Bay, Ga., which have been proposed as part of the latest round of military base closings.

Willard and other defense officials said that now the Navy is more efficient and submarines can be out at sea longer, therefore there will be enough berthing space for all the vessels.

But representatives from the Government Accountability Office said the Pentagon has overstated personnel savings from closings

proposed across the country - hurting one of the key arguments for shutting the Groton base.

Dodd, who was in Hartford Monday, said he is feeling slightly more optimistic about the state's chances of keeping Groton open. He said he spoke to two commission members Sunday evening.

"They listened patiently about some of the issues of cost," he said. "And I'm hopeful they'll raise them and listen carefully. But I'm very careful about approaching a commissioner. This is a very delicate job they have and I don't want to cross any lines."

He and other members of the delegation plan to meet with two of the commission members this week.

Commission members during Monday's hearing said there were significant problems with some of the recommendations and signaled that they will not be a rubber stamp for the Pentagon's plan.

Commission Chairman Anthony Principi has pledged to analyze the list independently and make changes if needed before sending it to President Bush for approval this fall.

"We want to make sure the best possible closure or realignment choices are made," Principi said. "It is not our intent to disrupt or to unreasonably target communities that may have breathed a sigh of relief in May when the secretary's list of recommendations was released, or to further burden communities already facing losses."

Retired general tries to save Air Guard base at Will Rogers

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Oklahoma City, OK)
July 18, 2005

A retired major general is trying to stop proposed changes at Will Rogers Air National Guard base that include moving the 137th Airlift Wing.

The Pentagon proposes moving the 137th to Tinker Air Force Base and sending the unit's C-130 Hercules aircraft to bases in Texas and Missouri. The proposal calls for Will Rogers to change its mission from providing airlift capability in support of troops fighting overseas to flying and maintaining KC-135 refueling planes.

But retired Maj. Gen. Stan Newman is leading a letter-writing campaign with other retired officers and families of current Guard members. So far they've sent about 100 letters to Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., in protest of the proposal.

"It defies all logic that this 'Blue Ribbon' organization will lose their airplanes, change missions and move to an overcrowded Tinker," Newman wrote.

The proposed changes are being considered by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

Inhofe said he was not involved in the decision-making, and the Pentagon proposals regarding Guard and Reserve units were developed with input from state governors and adjutant generals.

He said even if the Will Rogers Guard station loses the C-130s now stationed there, the Guard unit shouldn't lose its current training missions.

"We don't have to do that training with C-130s," Inhofe said, adding that it could be done on other planes with an airlift mission.

But, Newman and others said, the 137th does much more than training - and they want people to know.

In the years since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, members of the 137th have seen active duty in southeast Asia, taking troops and materiel overseas. Seven members have won the Bronze Star - five for their efforts in Afghanistan and two in Iraq.

Since those conflicts began, the 137th has flown more than 7,000 combat sorties and carried more than 31,000 passengers. Among them was Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and the

U.S. special forces group that rescued Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch from her captors in Iraq.

"It's risky business, and a difficult business, too," Newman said. "Flying at low altitude, following the terrain lots of times, all kinds of threats from below - it's pretty hairy, but it's very satisfying because you're really getting ... the beans and bullets to the guys that really need it."

BRAC commissioner challenges decision to close South Dakota base

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Washington DC)
Mary Clare Jalonick
July 18, 2005

A member of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission challenged the Pentagon's recommendation to consolidate the nation's fleet of B-1B bombers Monday, asking if the decision to close Ellsworth Air Force Base in Rapid City, S.D. is a threat to national security.

Ellsworth has 29 B-1B bombers, half the nation's fleet of the aircraft. The planes would join the others at Dyess Air Force Base in Texas under a Pentagon plan released in May.

Former Transportation Secretary Samuel Skinner, a member of the independent commission that will make the final decisions on base closures, asked Pentagon officials at a hearing Monday what would happen if there were a "major catastrophe" that took out the entire fleet at Dyess.

"It is clear that they are vulnerable," Skinner said.

Gen. Michael Moseley, Air Force vice chief of staff, said that the numbers of B-1Bs has decreased over time and the decision is "not inconsistent" with the consolidation of other fleets of aircraft.

Skinner, who visited Rapid City for a base closure hearing in June, also said the commission is wondering why Ellsworth is

recommended for closure this year when it was spared in the last round of base closings in 1995.

"We are trying to understand what has changed," Skinner said.

Pentagon officials defended the decision to consolidate and realign bases around the country Monday.

"Our recommendations had to accommodate a shrinking force structure, and in some cases, make tradeoffs between the states," said Lt. Gen. Stephen Wood, an Air Force deputy chief of staff.

The commission began two days of meetings on the base closure process Monday. Commissioners will make some preliminary decisions on the closure list this week but will not produce final recommendations until the fall.

The list will then head to White House and Congress for approval.

Air Force testifies in support of UAVs at Grand Forks

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Washington DC)
Mary Clare Jalonick
July 18, 2005

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission is meeting to decide whether to add military bases to the Pentagon's recommended list of closures - a vote that could include Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota.

Commissioners asked Pentagon officials several questions Monday about the plan to realign Grand Forks base, a sign that they may want to tweak the Pentagon's recommendation to keep Grand Forks open but remove the air tankers and most of its personnel.

A vote is expected Tuesday.

The commission asked the Pentagon in a letter earlier this month to elaborate on its reasons for realigning and not closing Grand Forks - another

indication that some commissioners may be interested in shutting it down completely. The commission is required by law to seek more information from the Pentagon before it adds new military installations to the closure list.

Air Force officials defended Grand Forks on Monday, reiterating an earlier commitment to bringing unmanned aerial vehicles to the base. That mission would replace the air tankers, officials have said.

Gen. Michael Moseley, Air Force vice chief of staff, told the commission that Grand Forks is a "perfect opportunity" to house unmanned flying drones, or UAVs.

"We believe this is a place for a family of UAVs as this mission grows and evolves," Moseley said.

The UAVs are the Global Hawk, which can relay images and sensor information to battlefield commanders, and the Predator, a missile-firing craft that also can be used for reconnaissance and surveillance. They would replace the base's air refueling tanker mission, which the Pentagon wants relocated to other bases.

Pentagon officials also testified that keeping Grand Forks open is important for homeland security reasons, since the base is near the northern border.

In a letter to the commission released July 14, Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England said Air Force officials originally wanted to close the base completely but had changed their minds.

Commissioner Admiral Harold W. Gehman, Jr., a retired Navy admiral, told Moseley that his comments were significant because they were part of sworn testimony.

"Your statements about future use are very important," Gehman said.

While some asked why the base was not recommended for closure, one commissioner

challenged Pentagon officials on the decision to move air tankers out of the base.

Commissioner Philip Coyle, a former Assistant Secretary of Defense, asked Air Force officials at the hearing why they were relocating the tanker mission when Grand Forks' location in the northern part of the country is favorable for flying missions across the North Pole.

"Isn't Grand Forks especially advantageous for tankers?" Coyle asked.

Moseley agreed but declined to elaborate.

"Absolutely," he said.

Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., said Monday that Moseley's comments indicated the base may be in line for newly built tankers scheduled to be finished in five or six years.

Conrad said the Pentagon's confidence in the base was encouraging, but the true test will be Tuesday's expected vote.

"Today was very good, tomorrow is critical," Conrad said.

At the hearing, Pentagon officials sought to dissuade the commission from changing any part of the Pentagon's closure plan. Michael Wynne, the Pentagon's technology and weapons-buying chief, stressed that changing one part of the proposal could disrupt other aspects of the "comprehensive, integrated and interdependent" package of recommended changes to the domestic military base structure.

A base can only be added if seven out of nine commissioners agree. Any bases added to the list can be removed later, but the commission won't make those decisions until August.

Once the commission has completed its list, the recommendations then will head to White House and Congress for approval.

Pentagon says Pope base won't lose all Air Force personnel

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Raleigh, NC)
Estes Thompson
July 18, 2005

If two major Air Force units are taken from Pope Air Force Base under a proposal to realign military bases, there still will be an Air Force presence at the field, according to the Pentagon.

In a letter dated July 14 to the Base Closure and Realignment Commission, the Pentagon said five Air Force units would remain at the air base after two wings that command cargo and fighter planes are sent elsewhere.

The units left behind are "to continue the present operational relationships" between the 18th Airborne Corps and the Air Force, said the letter. The Army paratroopers at Fort Bragg traditionally have used airplanes from Pope to deploy around the world.

Units that would remain include the 3rd Aerial Port Squadron, the 18th Air Support Operations Group headquarters, the 14th Air Support Operations Squadron, a detachment of the 373rd Training Squadron, the 43rd Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, according to the letter.

A spokesman at Pope said about 660 people would stay at Pope, which has a military population of 6,381, under the proposal. Pope began in 1918 as an Army air field.

"The numbers could fluctuate," Pope spokesman Capt. Khalid Canon said. "If and when the recommendations are accepted, some of those details would be established."

The letter also said the need for airlift by paratroopers at Bragg, including the 82nd Airborne Division, would be met by 16 Air Force Reserve planes from the 911th Airlift Wing.

Rep. Robin Hayes, R-N.C., said in a statement he was pleased to see questioning of the proposal for the two bases.

"I encourage the BRAC commission and the DOD to make their decisions carefully as Pope and Bragg certainly fit the new military vision of joint operations and missions," said Hayes, whose district includes part of the bases.

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., said it was imperative that the 82nd Airborne Division have sufficient airplanes to deploy.

"I'm encouraged that the BRAC Commission is doing a thorough job of reviewing the Department of Defense's recommendations," Burr said in a statement.

BRAC had asked the Pentagon to explain what considerations "drove the recommendations to realign, rather than close" the base. The Defense Department has recommended moving two Air Force units - the 43rd Airlift Wing and the 23rd Fighter Group - from Pope to other bases, transfer Pope to Army control and the Army Forces Command and Army Reserve Command to Bragg to allow closing of Fort McPherson, Ga.

Under that plan, more than 4,000 airmen would leave Pope, but the adjacent Fort Bragg would gain about 4,100 troops and 250 civilian jobs in the process.

Military officials said in the letter that moving the A-10 fighters to Moody Air Force Base in Georgia would allow new training relationships with Army units at Fort Benning, Ga. Benning is the proposed home of the Army's Maneuver Training Center, which consolidates infantry and armor schools.

"Locating Air Force A-10s near this consolidated Army training will lead to new opportunities of realistic close air support training for the Army and the Air Force," the letter said.

Other Air Force units will be deployed to Fort Bragg once the changeover is made for joint training with the Army, the letter said.

Questions about Air Guard moves give FS officials hope

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (Fort Smith, AR)

July 18, 2005

Questions raised about the legality of Pentagon moves to close or relocate some Air National Guard units have raised hopes of Arkansas officials that the guard's 188th Fighter Wing, based at the Fort Smith Airport, could escape massive cuts proposed by the Defense Department.

The Pentagon's recommendations to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission would cut about 670 jobs out of the 188th's 980 personnel and remove all 15 F-16 airplanes.

Last week, a lawyer for the commission said BRAC may not have the legal authority to approve many of the Pentagon's proposed cuts and closures, because defense policy gives state governors the final authority on National Guard units.

The matter could come up for discussion at a BRAC meeting planned for Tuesday. The state of Pennsylvania filed suit Monday challenging the Pentagon's authority to shut down a base in that state without the governor's consent.

Members of Arkansas' congressional delegation said the questions about National Guard unit changes are good news for those who are fighting proposed cuts to the 188th Fighter Wing.

"I think it's important that they're looking at that issue," said Sen. Mark Pryor, D-Ark. "I hope that means that they will not follow the Air Force's recommendation with regard to the 188th. But I think we need to keep working and keep pursuing all the angles we've been pursuing."

Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., said the issue about Pentagon authority over National Guard units "validates the solid case we've made to the BRAC Commission on behalf of the 188th Fighter Wing over the past several weeks."

Rep. John Boozman, R-Rogers, said the Defense Department was trying to exceed the scope of the Base Closure Act.

Col. Kevin Ware, acting commander of the 188th, said he is optimistic. Even if the memo does not result in all Air National Guard units being taken off the closure and realignment lists, a good case has been made for keeping the 188th as is or giving it a new mission, he said.

Mark Myers, spokesman for Fort Smith's BRAC Task Force, said the BRAC lawyer's memo raising questions was a generally positive development, but its significance will depend on how government officials interpret it and respond to it.

BRAC panel questions cost of closing MCRD - Marines call depot essential

Copley News Service (San Diego, CA)

Otto Kreisher

July 18, 2005

Members of the base realignment and closure commission Monday challenged the Pentagon's high cost estimate for closing Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego and transferring its activities to Parris Island, S.C., noting that 10 years ago that move was predicted to have saved \$500 million.

Marine Gen. William Nyland, however, defended the \$570 million estimated cost to relocate the San Diego recruit activities. He noted that since the 1995 BRAC round, the Marines had cut the number of personnel at their recruit depots, reducing the potential savings from consolidation and the cost of new construction had gone up.

Several commissioners also questioned why the Marines had to have two recruit training bases when the Air Force and the Navy, which have more personnel, can get by with one each.

The questions about the San Diego recruit depot were significant because the commissioners will

decide Tuesday whether to add any facilities to the Pentagon's proposed closure list.

Nyland, the assistant commandant, argued that the Marines could not risk "a single point of failure" in their recruit training because they had to replace 18 percent of their total force every year.

Because they are primarily a ground combat force, the Marines maintain a greater percentage of younger, first-term personnel than the other services, Nyland explained. Two-thirds of the 178,000 active duty Marines are on their first enlistment, he said.

Nyland also explained that the Marines have combined their recruiting and recruit training activities under one commander each for the Eastern and the Western states. That allows those commanders to become familiar with their regions and allows the recruiters to work more closely with the boot camps.

The "synergy" produced by those regional connections helps the Marines meet their monthly quotas in "a very difficult recruiting environment," Nyland said.

But he emphasized, because they had to keep more than 35,000 new Marines flowing into the Corps every year, they could not risk anything happening that would stop that flow. Two recruit depots would allow them to adjust if something happened to one and also would give them the ability to increase the number of recruits if they had to add personnel quickly, he said.

In preparation for Monday's hearing, the commission had challenged the Pentagon to explain why a dozen facilities were not considered for closure. The list included the recruit depot and the Navy's Broadway headquarters complex.

Michael Wynne, who had supervised the Pentagon process that produced the BRAC list, said the Broadway facilities were considered for closure. But none of the activities that occupy the three buildings was considered appropriate

for relocation, so the complex itself was not recommended for closure, he said.

In a report sent to the commission last week, the Pentagon also suggested that any proposal to vacate the Broadway complex so the valuable harbor-front property could be redeveloped would be best handled by negotiations between the Navy and the City of San Diego.

None of the commissioners asked any questions about the Broadway facilities, indicating it was unlikely to be added to the list for possible closure.

The commissioners were much more interested in the Navy's plans to retain Naval Air Station Oceana, Va., despite major problems with urban encroachment and noise complaints, and its desire to close the submarine base at Groton, Conn., and the nearby Portsmouth, N.H., Naval Shipyard.

Adm. Robert Willard, vice chief of naval operations, said the Navy would like to build a new East Coast master jet base to replace Oceana some time in the future, but did not want to relocate the aircraft located there now. Willard said the planned reduction in the submarine force made both Groton and Portsmouth excess and the Pearl Harbor Navy Shipyard was more valuable than Portsmouth because of its location.

The Battle To Save Texas Military Bases Is Far From Over

San Antonio Express-News (San Antonio, TX)
Sig Christenson
July 18, 2005

Although the base closure commission's San Antonio regional hearing is history, some might be tempted to think there's nothing to do now but wait.

But work has only begun in Texas, where the Alamo City has much to gain and towns in East Texas and the Gulf Coast have much to lose as the 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission sorts through a mountain of data.

Next up for the San Antonio Area Military Missions Task Force is to make sure the nine commissioners, three of them with local ties, get information to an overworked BRAC staff that supports the case the city made in a 15-minute presentation last week.

That information is bound to conflict with the recommendations from this year's round, the fifth since 1988. Reversing a Pentagon BRAC recommendation requires a majority vote.

"We're engaging with the BRAC analysts now to find out what data they need and to help in any way possible," said task force chairman John G. Jernigan.

The commission meets today and Tuesday in Washington. A chief topic on the agenda is the possibility of targeting more bases and missions for closure -- an action certain to rattle communities that dodged the BRAC bullet.

Much is at stake for Texas.

Naval Station Ingleside and Red River Army Depot in Texarkana, home to 7,700 jobs that are major drivers in the local economies, are to close. Fort Hood is to lose more than 8,000 troops by the end of the decade. Corpus Christi Army Depot could lose 1,000 jobs, creating a ripple.

Though San Antonio is to lose Brooks City-Base and see Wilford Hall Medical Center transformed into a clinic, overall the city stands to gain 3,500 jobs and \$ 1 billion in construction. Jernigan's task force is trying to save three key missions at Brooks as it gains 9,364 jobs for Fort Sam Houston, which would become a Defense Department Center for Joint Enlisted Training.

A letter from the BRAC commission chairman, Anthony Principi, hints that the panel is skeptical of plans for a massive realignment of Air National Guard assets, which could be good news for Ellington Field in Houston. Its dozen or so F-16A fighters would be retired under the

BRAC proposal, and the 147th Fighter Wing inactivated.

One commissioner, retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd W. "Fig" Newton, said more base tours and regional hearings will be sought if the panel calls for new realignments or shutdowns.

Newton and fellow commissioner Sue Ellen Turner said after the San Antonio hearing that they hadn't received all the information they needed before deciding how they'll vote.

The Pentagon made 2,400 separate recommendations in its 2005 base closure report.

BRAC faces a Sept. 8 deadline to send its recommendations to President Bush.

"Probably time is the biggest challenge we have at the moment," Newton said.

There's also the matter of resources. At least 600 communities in 50 states, Puerto Rico and Guam are affected by this year's round.

Jernigan said he believes panelists will reassess folding 26 Defense Finance and Accounting Service's offices into three Midwest mega-centers. The move, which would cost 318 San Antonio jobs, is designed to cut the work force and increase efficiency, but drew protests at the BRAC hearing.

Yolunda Vilches, president of American Federation of Government Employees Local 1022 in San Antonio, said the mega-centers are in the wrong towns -- Denver, Indianapolis and Columbus, Ohio.

All the offices have suffered weather-related closures that required workers in the San Antonio office to help process paychecks, travel payments and medical reimbursements for the Army Medical Command at Fort Sam Houston and Air Education and Training Command at Randolph AFB.

With local elected official's support, Vilchers says, the San Antonio DFAS office might survive.

Jernigan suggested establishing a mega-center at Brooks, which will have extra building space if the panel affirms Pentagon plans to shutter the facility.

Pentagon's Air Guard Cuts Are Assailed

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

Philip Dine

July 19, 2005

WASHINGTON - The Pentagon's plans to reduce or eliminate a number of Air National Guard units - including the 131st F-15 Fighter Wing at Lambert Field and the 183rd F-16 Fighter Wing in Springfield, Ill. - came under heavy fire Monday, placing the entire plan in question.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission told senior Pentagon officials at a hearing to revise their plans, calling them unacceptable.

Among commissioners' allegations were that the Pentagon, and particularly the Air Force:

*Didn't consult with Air National Guard officials in reaching decisions.

*Was endangering the ability of states to protect their citizens in the event of natural disasters, terrorism or other emergencies.

*May lack the legal authority to close or change the mission of National Guard bases without the consent of the state's governor.

*Will hurt future recruiting and retention efforts by forcing Guard and Reserve members to travel farther for training.

Adm. Harold Gehman, a commission member who was NATO's supreme allied commander before retiring in 2000, accused the Air Force of "substantially deviating" from the laws governing the base realignment process. He also said the Air Force apparently had "misapplied" military value criteria and substituted its judgment for objective data.

The term "substantially deviating" is significant because such a finding by commissioners would allow the panel to strike Pentagon recommendations from the final list the commission will present to the White House and Congress.

In an interview later, Gehman said: "What we would like to do is to have a little more cooperation between the Air National Guard and the Air Force to come up with a plan we can support. This plan has a lot of problems with it - we're not happy with it, the governors are not happy with it."

Gehman was one of the three commission members at a hearing June 20 in St. Louis.

In a separate interview, commission member Phillip Coyle, the former top Pentagon evaluator of military systems, said that under the plans to move reserve units, about 30 governors would be left with no airlift or jet fighter capacity to deal with emergencies.

Lt. Gen. Stephen Wood, the Air Force's deputy chief of staff, acknowledged at Monday's hearing that there had been little consultation but defended the recommendations as achieving "a 15 percent improvement in efficiency (by) this move toward larger squadrons."

But commission Chairman Anthony Principi said the Air Force was "creating a long-term problem" in recruiting by taking aircraft and missions away from local units.

Sam Skinner, another commissioner and Illinois resident who served in former President George Bush's Cabinet, said the model relationship among the Air Force, Guard and Reserves is now imperiled.

Monday's session was the first chance for commissioners to take up with Pentagon officials what they had learned in their hearings with local leaders around the country.

Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond, R-Mo., applauded the commission's comments.

"Throughout this process, I have voiced serious concerns, along with Air Guard leaders, that the Air Guard was not a substantive participant in the BRAC deliberative process," Bond said. "It is my hope the entire BRAC commission will reject the Air Force proposals as they impact Air Guard infrastructure."

Andrew Ross, spokesman for the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, said the commission raised "all the arguments that Gov. (Rod) Blagojevich has been making since Day One" about the Pentagon's recommended closure list.

"The failure to coordinate with him obviously compromises the integrity of the process, and disregarded his role as commander in chief of the Illinois National Guard," Ross said.

Under Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's recommendations, 28 of 88 Guard flying units around the country are scheduled to lose their planes - a greater impact than is being felt by other military installations. Some analysts argue that since the end of the Cold War, the active force has taken a hit but reserve branches have been largely left alone.

David Berteau, who ran the Pentagon's base closing process in the 1991 and 1993 rounds in Republican and Democratic administrations, said after the hearing: "It's pretty clear that just about everybody except the Air Force thinks they didn't get it right. I would say based upon the comments today, it looks like the Air Force Air National Guard plan is in trouble with the commission."

Air Force generals said in interviews that they would meet with their superiors at the Pentagon to see how to proceed. "What it says to me," said Wood, the Air Force deputy chief of staff, "is we need to do a better job working with the commission and providing them the information they need."

Oceana 'Best Option' For A Few Years, Admiral Says

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)

Dale Eisman and Jon W. Glass
July 19, 2005

WASHINGTON — Oceana Naval Air Station "continues to be the Navy's best option" to serve as hub for its East Coast-based fighter planes, but it may need to be replaced within a decade, the service's second-ranking admiral said Monday.

Adm. Robert F. Willard, the vice chief of naval operations, told a commission studying basing issues that when the F-35 "Joint Strike Fighter" starts entering service about 2012, the Navy might require a new "master jet base" elsewhere on the East Coast.

There is "no mature plan" for a new base, Willard stressed, and no available estimate of how much such a facility would cost or how long it would take to construct. The Navy has not opened a new air base since 1961.

Oceana, a sprawling facility roughly two miles from the Virginia Beach Oceanfront, is the city's largest employer and a key part of the Hampton Roads economy. It was carved out of farmland in the 1940s but is ringed today by subdivisions and shopping centers.

A chorus of nearby residents has urged the Navy to limit operations at the base because of concerns about noise and safety hazards. In response, the service has altered some of its flight patterns, though Willard insisted on Monday that the changes have not significantly diminished Oceana's value to the Navy as a training facility for pilots.

Willard and Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Wynne told a commission studying possible base closures that the F-35 could turn out to be noisier than the F/A-18 Super Hornets and the F-14 Tomcats now operating at Oceana.

"This community cannot wait 12 or 16 years to have the Oceana issues addressed," Hal Levenson, a spokesman for Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise, the group leading the fight to scale back the base, said after Monday's hearing.

Levenson urged the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission to postpone today's scheduled vote on whether to add Oceana to a list of 33 major bases being actively considered for closure.

Placing Oceana on the list will require the votes of seven of the nine commissioners. The panel is to issue its base closing recommendations by Sept. 8; Congress and President Bush must accept or reject the plan as a package, a feature designed to squeeze political influence from the closing process.

Levenson argued that the commission should hold a separate hearing devoted to Oceana before acting.

But Virginia Beach officials said they're heartened that the Navy wants to retain Oceana for now and insisted that they'll fight to maintain it permanently. And even if the Navy decides to build a new master jet base elsewhere, it could decide to shift support aircraft or other missions to Oceana rather than close the base, they said.

"I did not hear anything that predicted eminent doom for Oceana" in the Pentagon's presentation Monday to the base closure commission, Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf said.

She said commission staff members have told her they consider noise complaints at the base a nuisance. The panel appears more concerned about the safety of people living and working in areas near the base along the flight paths of arriving and departing jets, she said.

Other city leaders said Virginia Beach needs to begin discussing alternative plans for development in the Oceana area should the Navy or the base closure commission decide to close or downsize the base.

"If the hand writing is on the wall, prudence would dictate that we should be looking at a number of different scenarios," Councilman Richard Maddox said.

"To put your head in the sand and say it will never happen is not realistic," Councilman Peter Schmidt said. "We need to look out for the best interests of Virginia Beach in the long term, with the potential of Oceana not being there."

Maddox added that "the nightmare scenario" would be a Navy decision to "mothball the base so you can't do anything except have this big hole in the middle of the city."

With so many unknowns, however, Maddox said the city must uphold its accord with the Navy to restrict the development of homes and other uses around Oceana that the Navy deems incompatible.

"Right now we have no choice but to honor the agreement and demonstrate our good faith and desire to keep the Navy here," he said.

Four commissioners, including Chairman Anthony J. Principi, asked pointed questions about Oceana at Monday's hearing. They pressed Willard, Wynne and Air Force Gen. Michael Moseley for details on talks between Navy and Air Force leaders about a possible Navy takeover of Moody Air Force Base in Georgia or another existing Air Force base as a home for Oceana's fighters.

Both sides were willing to consider a takeover or the creation of a joint base from an existing Air Force facility, the military leaders testified, but in each case the shift would require the Navy to divide Oceana's planes and personnel between at least two bases.

The split-siting would wipe out the financial savings the Navy would gain by closing Oceana, Willard said, and weaken the ties between elements of the Atlantic Fleet's air forces.

Willard said that besides Moody – a base near Valdosta, Ga. – Navy and Air Force leaders discussed shifting Oceana's operations to Shaw Air Force Base, S.C.; Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C.; and Tyndall and Patrick Air Force bases, both in Florida.

The admiral said the noise issues the Navy has encountered at Oceana are no different from those at some other major air bases. And Navy leaders believe they could compensate for any loss in Oceana's value as a training asset by developing a new auxiliary airstrip in Washington County, N.C., he stressed.

The service's plan for an outlying landing field in Washington County is being challenged in federal court. Willard sidestepped a question about whether the Navy ultimately would like to make the proposed outlying landing field site the home of a new base that would replace Oceana.

Opinions/ Editorials

Preparing for base closings wise move for leaders;

Politicians are reluctant to appear accepting of the loss, but it's time to plan for the worst.

Portland Press Herald (Portland, ME)
July 18, 2005

The 11 years since the 1994 Senate race are not long enough to make Maine politicians forget the last time a public official accepted a decision to close a military base here.

Sen. Olympia Snowe used a vote by former U.S. Rep. Tom Andrews to support the base closing process that shuttered Loring Air Force Base to good effect in her first race for the Senate. Since that time, Maine politicians have had only one response to suggestions that bases here might close: fight and fight some more.

That's admirable, but taken to the extreme this attitude can be bad for the state.

It certainly makes sense for Snowe, Sen. Susan Collins, Reps. Tom Allen and Michael Michaud and Gov. Baldacci to do all they can to save the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Brunswick Naval Air Station and a defense accounting operation in Limestone. Indeed, Maine's congressional delegation and its governor deserve collective praise in their efforts to convince the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to

reconsider the Pentagon's plans to shutter Maine's bases.

Still, only about 15 percent of the bases that are recommended for closure by the military end up being taken off such a list by the commissions that review those recommendations. The odds are Maine is going to lose these bases, and it's not too soon to start preparing.

To that end, York County officials deserve praise. They're bringing together regional planners and area business people to look at how the county can survive the loss of about 2,000 jobs as a result of the shipyard closing.

The idea is to convene a summit sometime next month, a few weeks before the base closing panel issues its final recommendations.

That makes good sense, and these efforts deserve support from the state's major political figures, both behind the scenes and in public view.

Already, Gov. Baldacci says the state Department of Labor is undertaking an analysis of the skills of workers in the affected areas, which is a good way of figuring out what kinds of businesses can be successfully recruited in the event of base closures.

It's not too soon to talk about other steps required to overcome the loss of the bases. Serious discussions ought to be taking place with regard to re-use of the bases - especially when it comes to cleaning up any environmental problems.

While there is a risk that such talk can end up looking like an endorsement of the base closure process, starting these discussions at the highest levels is what is best for the people of Maine.

Base Motives

Richmond Times Dispatch (Richmond, VA)
July 18, 2005

Listening to the complaints of some residents around Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia

Additional Notes

Beach, or reading about hearings of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) that seem more like pep rallies, one would think the purpose of military bases is to provide a high quality of life for the communities surrounding them.

In an extremely broad sense, of course, that is the purpose: The military protects those communities from becoming vassals of foreign invaders, hot zones of biological warfare, or smoldering radioactive wastelands. But this is not what the neighboring communities mean. In Virginia Beach those who are unhappy with Oceana's presence complain about jet noise and traffic -- and of course they should be heard, just as the Navy should do what it realistically can to mitigate those irritants. In New England, where several military bases have been put on the chopping block, the people wearing "Save Our Shipyard" T-shirts and transported to a hearing on state-supplied school buses voiced concerns about jobs.

Naturally, the cheering squad at the recent hearing in Boston insisted that the Pentagon got it all wrong when it calculated the value of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine, the Naval Submarine Base in Connecticut, and the Otis Air National Guard Base in Massachusetts. Number-crunchers in green eyeshades probably could quibble with this Pentagon figure or that Pentagon conclusion. But the Pentagon seems far more likely to provide an objective analysis of the nation's military infrastructure than individual states and localities dependent upon certain parts of it.

Indeed, it was the inability of Congressmen who put parochial interests above national interest to deal with base-closing issues effectively that led to the creation of BRAC in the first place. Hearings are a necessary part of the process, but no one should consider them decisive. Votes don't determine the sum of two plus two, and facts are not subject to revision by a show of hands. BRAC's responsibility is reorganizing military assets to improve the defense of the nation. Everything else should remain a distant secondary, if not tertiary, concern.