

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

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**Leaders address Air Force in BRAC
process**

American Forces Press Service
Army Sgt. 1st Class Doug Sample
July 19, 2005

WASHINGTON (AFPN) -- Defense Department leaders told the Base Realignment and Closure Commission July 18 why certain military facilities are not included in Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's May 13 recommendations.

Commissioners were here to continue their deliberations after visiting military bases nationwide 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.

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

Mr. Wynne said the department considered building a new 21st century master jet base, but

such action would occur "outside the BRAC window and BRAC time frame."

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

"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 said Oceana provides a significant advantage because it is 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.

Gen. T. Michael Moseley, recently confirmed as the next Air Force chief of staff, said the Defense Department's decision to retain Moody was a good decision. He said Moody, near the U.S. Army 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."

Mr. Wynne told commissioners that "jointness was a key goal" to many of Secretary Rumsfeld's recommendations on which bases to close or realign. For example, he said Pope AFB, N.C., was realigned rather than closed so the Army could relocate Forces Command headquarters there from Fort McPherson, Ga.

He said the base will allow for joint training opportunities between Airmen and Soldiers and provide airlift for troops stationed at adjacent Fort Bragg, N.C.

Meanwhile, Mr. Wynne said Grand Forks AFB, 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.

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

He said department leaders will ensure 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."

Secretary Rumsfeld recommended closing 33 major bases and realigning 29 other major bases out of a total of 318 bases. The nine-person 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.

National News Articles

Va. Navy Air Base Put on Review List Officials Decry Panel's Vote on Oceana

Washington Post
Michelle Boorstein
July 20, 2005

Oceana Naval Air Station, Virginia Beach's largest employer, was added to the list yesterday of military bases across the country that may be closed or shrunk.

The vote on Oceana by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission put a second Hampton Roads facility on the list, in addition to the Army's Fort Monroe. The region, in southeastern Virginia, has the largest concentration of U.S. military in the world. Some 15,000 people work at Oceana, including civilians.

Local, state and federal officials quickly denounced the action of the commission, whose members have said residential growth around Oceana has increased the risk to people living in the area.

Oceana, a Navy "master jet base," hosts F-14 Tomcats and F/A-18 Hornets and Super Hornets that are deployed aboard aircraft carriers.

"This is a wake-up call, not just for Virginia but for every base in the country and every one of those localities. If we value the presence of the military in our communities, we need to protect them in terms of developmental encroachment," said Tom Gordy, chief of staff for Rep. Thelma D. Drake (R-Va.), whose district has eight military bases, including Oceana and Fort Monroe.

Similar reactions have been heard across the country since May, when the Defense Department submitted its list of hundreds of bases to shut down or downsize.

Bases added to the list yesterday will be visited by two members of the commission, and public hearings will be held before the nine-member commission votes in August; it takes seven members to recommend realigning or closing Oceana. The commission's final list is due to reach President Bush in September.

Among the dozen bases and smaller installations added yesterday were the Naval Air Station in Brunswick, Maine, which the Pentagon had identified for downsizing but which now could be closed, and the Navy Broadway Complex in San Diego, for which the Pentagon had not proposed any change.

The Navy has been talking for some time about its need for training space somewhere with more room than Oceana, which is 3,000 acres.

Officials have said they would like 30,000 acres and have been trying to purchase property in North Carolina. But the Navy has been saying it would keep Oceana open for now and pair it with a training facility, Gordy said.

In the long term, the Pentagon has said, it wants to replace Oceana with a new master base on the East Coast -- but not during the current round of base closings. The commission has asked the Pentagon before about the possibility of closing

Oceana earlier and moving its jets temporarily to Moody Air Force Base in Georgia.

Testifying Monday before the commission, Adm. Robert F. Willard, vice chief of naval operations, said that the Navy is pleased with Oceana and that issues of encroachment "have been and are manageable."

The Pentagon estimates that closing Oceana and moving the jets temporarily would cost \$494 million, Gordy said.

Putting Oceana on the list is "illogical, shortsighted and wasteful," Sen. George Allen (R-Va.) said in a statement. "In Virginia Beach, every time a jet flies over -- people say, 'That is the sound of freedom.'"

Gov. Mark R. Warner (D) said in an interview last night that he was surprised that Oceana was added to the list. "What we're seeing today is wholesale additions and subtractions. It's unprecedented in the BRAC process," he said. "But this is not the final decision. It's one more step in the process."

Base Expansion Could Be a Boon for El Paso

The Washington Post
Alicia A. Caldwell
July 19, 2005

EL PASO, Texas -- For years, El Paso has taken it on the chin. Less-than-scientific studies and magazine articles have ranked El Paso among the dumbest, fattest, even sweatiest cities in America. Worse, El Paso has lost a number of big industries, including blue-jeans makers and an energy company.

But El Paso's fortunes may be changing, thanks to a Pentagon recommendation that could double the number of troops at nearby Fort Bliss and bring more high-paying jobs and perhaps an economic resurgence to this city of about 600,000 along the Mexican border.

Hundreds of business owners have swamped Chamber of Commerce meetings to learn how to

become federal contractors if President Bush approves the realignment. The move could mean a wealth of contracts to build houses, roads, schools and other infrastructure.

"This could be the beginning of a real renaissance for El Paso," City Councilman Beto O'Rourke said.

Under the Pentagon proposal, Army troops based in Germany and South Korea would be brought home and stationed at Fort Bliss.

With the Army able to house only about 40 percent of its 12,000 personnel now stationed at the 1.1 million-acre post, the El Paso housing market could see a huge expansion.

New construction as a result of the expansion of Fort Bliss is expected to add as much \$2 billion to the region's economy in the next four years, said Richard Dayoub, president of the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce.

The median household income in El Paso, as of 2003, was about \$37,000, and most of the jobs are minimum-wage service or manufacturing jobs. As of May, the unemployment rate was 7.3 percent, well over the national rate.

While the expansion could be a boon to the city's economy, it could also bring problems -- namely, traffic gridlock and crowded classrooms.

Mayor John Cook, who took office in June, said the city's three school districts, with a total of more than 142,000 students, are already "bursting at the seams," and have set their sights on expanding, renovating and building new schools.

As for new roads, Gov. Rick Perry has already pledged about \$16 million in state funds for an overpass to provide better access from Fort Bliss to adjacent Biggs Army Air Field.

The first test for the city will come this summer, when nearly 4,000 new soldiers are scheduled to arrive as part of the expansion.

Bliss spokeswoman Jean Offutt said the post's importance to the region's economy was recognized in another round of base closings in 1995, when the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment and its nearly 6,000 soldiers were moved to Fort Carson, Colo.

"I think the community kind of realized that if they were not real active in supporting their post, who knows what the future might hold?" Offutt said.

Northeast Base Closings Worry Chairman

New York Times
July 20, 2005

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The chairman of the military base closure commission expressed doubts about the Pentagon's plans to close so many bases in the northeastern United States, saying he believes the military should be present in every part of the country.

Chairman Anthony Principi, during a hearing to consider adding several bases to the Pentagon's closure list, worried that the military was "virtually abandoning that section of the country."

Speaking to reporters after the hearing Tuesday, Principi described his reservations as grounded in the military's relationship with the civilian public, not in the military utility of those bases.

"I think it's important for our nation that our military and our society are close together," he said. "I think that's important for democracy. That's important for recruiting. That's important for retention. It's important for building support for our engagements overseas."

His words may give some hope to communities in Connecticut and Maine that face massive job losses in the Defense Department's effort to consolidate bases.

Some of the other commissioners nodded when Principi made his comments.

On the chopping block are two major New England bases -- the submarine base at Groton, Conn., and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine. Pentagon officials suggest the dense population, high land prices and high cost of living in the Northeast make the region less suitable for military bases than elsewhere.

The Pentagon projects that closing the two major bases and several smaller military sites in Connecticut and Maine would mean the loss of nearly 30,000 jobs on and off the bases. Work would shift to facilities in Norfolk, Va. and Kings Bay, Ga., defense officials say.

Still, Principi and his fellow commissioners added several bases to the Pentagon's list Tuesday, including one in Maine the Pentagon had already planned to downsize drastically. Commissioners said that adding the bases would give the commission more flexibility as it considers the military's proposals.

With many of the additional bases, the commission will not be locked into the Pentagon's plan but will be able to consider alternatives to specific Pentagon proposals.

"This commission knows what it is talking about and is not a rubber stamp. We are an independent check on the power of the secretary (of defense) to close and realign military bases," Principi said of the nine-member commission.

None of the additions to the list will necessarily close; commissioners said adding them to the list was a necessary step so they could be studied. Each must be voted on again by the commission, and the final base list is subject to presidential and congressional approval.

Perhaps the largest potential shift came with a proposal to close the Navy's jet training base at Oceana, Va. Commission researchers said development in the nearby community of Virginia Beach, Va., is encroaching on pilots' ability to practice taking off and landing at all hours.

The military had considered closing the base but did not have another suitable base to send its

operations. The commission will now be able to consider an array of options.

Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine, the Galena Airport Forward Operation Location, Alaska, and Pope Air Force Base, N.C., were added to the list of installations facing possible closure.

With an eye on possibly merging certain administrative, educational and medical functions, the commission also voted to include several small installations in Colorado, Ohio, Indiana, California, Virginia and Washington, D.C., for consideration.

They join the list submitted by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld in May that proposed closing or reducing forces at 62 major domestic bases and hundreds of smaller installations from coast to coast.

In an afternoon of votes, the commission declined to add four other facilities: the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego; the Naval Shipyard at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; Moody Air Force Base in Georgia; and Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota.

More Military Bases Added to List of Proposed Closings

New York Times
July 20, 2005

WASHINGTON, July 19 (AP) - Military installations in California, Maine and Virginia were added Tuesday to the hundreds that Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld had already proposed for closing or shrinking.

The Navy Broadway Complex in San Diego and the Naval Air Station in Brunswick, Me., were placed on the list of sites to be closed by an independent commission reviewing the Defense Department's recommendations.

The Naval Master Jet Base at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia, which the Pentagon proposed trimming in size, would be reduced even further or shut down, the base-closing commission decided. The commission was

voting Tuesday on whether to add locations in 11 states and Washington, D.C., to the list. The panel is making final decisions next month about which bases to propose for closing or reductions, with President Bush and Congress making a binding decision in the fall.

The San Diego complex has headquarters for Navy operations in the Southwest, while the Navy's tactical air units are trained and deployed from the Virginia base. The Brunswick base is the last active-duty Defense Department airfield in New England and one of Maine's largest employers, with nearly 4,900 military and civilian workers. It had been scheduled for downsizing but now will be considered for closing.

Before voting on additions, the chairman of the commission, Anthony J. Principi, said that adding a base to the list "does not necessarily mean that the base will be realigned or closed" but would allow the panel to further analyze those bases' usefulness by visiting sites, collecting data and holding hearings.

In a reprieve for California, the commission voted against putting the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego on the closings list even though several commissioners had wanted to consider merging it with the service's other recruiting installation, at Parris Island, S.C.

The Naval Shipyard at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, also was saved. Several commissioners had wanted to put the Pacific shipyard on the list to compare its performance with another base scheduled for closing, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Me.

The panel also declined to add Moody Air Force Base in Georgia to the list.

Two more military facilities targeted for closing

USA Today
June 19, 2005

WASHINGTON (AP) — The base-closing commission voted Tuesday to add a handful of

military facilities in eight states and the nation's capital to the hundreds that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld wants to close or shrink. The Navy Broadway Complex in San Diego and the Naval Air Station in Brunswick, Maine, now are on the list of installations to be closed. Under the commission's actions, the Naval Master Jet Base at the Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia and Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina would see even more force reductions than the Pentagon proposed or would be shut down.

Even small facilities were not immune. With an eye on possibly merging administrative, education and medical services, the commission voted to include several small installations in Colorado, Ohio, Indiana, California, Virginia and Washington, D.C., for consideration.

The Galena Airport Forward Operating Location in Alaska also now is on the list for either closure or downsizing.

In an afternoon of votes, the panel declined to add four other facilities.

The votes showed the independent commission's willingness to diverge — at least somewhat — from the plan Rumsfeld submitted in May, when he proposed closing or reducing forces at 62 major domestic bases and hundreds of smaller installations from coast to coast.

"This commission knows what it is talking about and is not a rubber stamp. We are an independent check on the power of the secretary to close and realign military bases," commission Chairman Anthony Principi said after the vote.

Some in Congress had feared the panel would simply sign off on Rumsfeld's plan without looking at options.

By adding bases to the list, the commission gave itself more flexibility to change what the Pentagon proposed as it considers shifting pieces of the mammoth domestic base network to better suit today's defense needs.

Earlier, Principi cautioned that adding a base to the list "does not necessarily mean that the base

will be realigned or closed" but will allow the panel to further analyze those bases' usefulness by visiting sites, collecting data and holding hearings.

The panel will make final decisions next month about which bases to propose for closing or reductions, with President Bush and Congress making a binding decision in the fall. But the panel's actions Tuesday were sure to ignite a new round of lobbying by communities whose military facilities were being targeted.

In a reprieve for some communities, the commission decided against targeting four large bases for closure: the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego; the Naval Shipyard at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; Moody Air Force Base in Georgia; and Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota.

Others up for consideration weren't so fortunate. The San Diego facility has headquarters for Navy operations in the Southwest, while the Navy's tactical air units are trained and deployed from the Virginia base and the Air Force conducts joint tactical operations from the North Carolina installation.

The Brunswick air base is the last active-duty Defense Department airfield in New England and one of Maine's largest employers, with nearly 4,900 military and civilian workers. It had been slated for force reductions but now will be considered for closure. The Galena airfield is one of the two "forward operation locations" in Alaska that serve as alert bases for aircraft.

At this stage, adding bases to the Pentagon's proposed list of closures or consolidations will allow the commission to conduct public hearings, visit those sites and collect data, in some situations making direct comparisons with bases that perform similar missions and are slated for closure.

It took votes from seven of nine commission members to add a base to the list. The commission then will have to reaffirm each decision in August with seven of nine votes.

Other bases on the Pentagon's list can be removed then with five of nine votes.

Commissioners also have expressed serious reservations with the Pentagon's plan to disband or move dozens of Air National Guard units. However, that issue was not slated to be voted on Tuesday, and commissioners were working behind the scenes to determine what to do with that part of the proposal.

BRAC panel adds bases to closure list

GovExec

Daniel Pulliam

July 19, 2005

Members of the independent base closure commission voted Tuesday to add several military installations to the Pentagon's list of facilities that the panel will consider recommending for closure or realignment in the coming weeks.

The Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine and the Naval Broadway Complex in San Diego were added to the list of bases that could be closed. The Naval Master Jet Base at Oceana, Va., and two Air Force bases--North Carolina's Pope Air Force Base and Alaska's Galena Airport Forward Operating Location--will be considered for further reductions than the Pentagon proposed.

Each added base received at least seven of the nine commissioners' votes. Bases considered but left off the list because they did not receive enough votes included the San Diego Marine Corps Recruit Depot; the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard in Hawaii; Georgia's Moody Air Force Base and North Dakota's Grand Forks Air Force Base.

The Pearl Harbor shipyard came the closest to being added to the list, with a five to four vote in favor of adding it. The commission questioned Pentagon officials Monday, asking why Portsmouth Naval Yard in Maine was on the list, and the Pearl Harbor shipyard, which has been rated as less efficient, was not. Pentagon officials testified that they made the best

decisions possible, but would support additional recommendations.

The commission also voted in favor of looking at whether to merge several small facilities providing administrative, education and medical services.

Before deliberations began, BRAC Chairman Anthony Principi said a vote in favor of adding a base did not necessarily mean that commissioners ultimately would recommend closure. Rather, he said, commissioners were simply seeking to add some bases to the original list submitted by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on May 13 so comparisons can be made.

"We now have the opportunity to examine the broader picture," Principi said.

At least two commissioners will visit each base added to the list and representatives from the communities will be given an opportunity to testify in regional hearings.

Before the commission makes its final recommendations, Rumsfeld, the heads of the services and other Pentagon officials will be asked to provide comments.

Panel Adds Eight Facilities To Rumsfeld's Original BRAC List

Congress Daily

Megan Scully

July 20, 2005

The Base Closure and Realignment Commission Tuesday voted to study whether to shutter or restructure another eight military installations in addition to the lengthy list of closures recommended by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld in May.

During a four-hour public hearing on Capitol Hill, the nine-member commission also opted to spare four installations from additional scrutiny in this base-closure round, including Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard in Hawaii and the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego. The four facilities were not on Rumsfeld's list, but

had surfaced as possible candidates for closure or realignment.

The independent panel will wait to make any firm decisions on base closures until next month, when commissioners will meet to mark up their final recommendations, due Sept. 8 to the White House.

Perhaps the biggest move made by the commission was a decision to study whether to close the Master Jet Base Oceana in Virginia Beach, Va., largely because community development is encroaching on the facility and hindering training missions.

If Oceana is shuttered, the community would lose 10,000 military and civilian jobs, and the Navy would be forced to set up a new jet base in a less populated area.

In its BRAC deliberations, the Navy recognized a need to relocate the jet base, but said such a move would take longer than the six-year timeframe mandated under BRAC law.

But commissioners saw the move as an inevitability, given the growing population of the surrounding community and said they might offer short-term solutions to the problem.

During the hearing, the commission ruled out one potential alternative: moving all Oceana personnel and aircraft to Moody Air Force Base, Ga. Such a move would require the Air Force to clear its 5,000 personnel out of Moody, which is slated for three relatively minor realignments, to make room for the influx from Oceana.

A decision to close Moody would limit the commission from looking at other facilities to house a future Master Jet Base, Commissioner Lloyd Newton argued. The proposal garnered only one of the seven votes needed to add an installation to the list for further study.

The commission also voted to study whether to close the Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine, which the Pentagon hoped to keep open to hedge against any future needs.

But the current proposal for Brunswick realignment offers the community with the worst of both worlds, because it would have little hope to recoup 2,400 job losses by redeveloping the land, Commissioner James Bilbray said during the hearing.

A Brunswick closure will affect 3,200 jobs, but would allow the community eventually to use the land for other purposes.

Minutes later, the BRAC panel made the opposite decision for Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota, which is also slated to lose most -- but not all -- of its jobs. The Pentagon wants to keep the base open for future unmanned aerial vehicle missions, though it has not devised a plan for how to do it.

Leading up to the hearing, there had been much speculation that the panel would opt to close the Pearl Harbor Naval Yard, largely because it is considered far less efficient than Maine's Portsmouth Naval Yard, which Rumsfeld recommends closing. While the commission opted not to shut down Pearl's depot facilities, it did not endorse Portsmouth's closure.

Several commissioners, including Chairman Anthony Principi, cautioned that the Navy might need all four of its shipyards to repair and maintain its aging fleet.

Commissioners gave few hints about what they would ultimately decide. However, Principi expressed some concern about the effect of a spate of closings that might occur throughout New England.

Decisions to close Portsmouth, Brunswick, and the massive New London Submarine Base in Connecticut would mean the military is virtually abandoning that section of the country, he said.

Base-closing commission votes to add some bases to Pentagon list

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
Liz Sidoti
July 19, 2005

The base-closing commission voted Tuesday to add two military facilities, in California and Maine, to the list of hundreds of domestic bases that Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld has proposed closing and shrinking.

The Navy Broadway Complex in San Diego and the Naval Air Station in Brunswick, Maine, were added to the list of facilities to be closed. The commission also was voting on whether to add bases in nine other states and Washington, D.C.

The San Diego facility has headquarters for Navy operations in the Southwest, while the Brunswick air base is the last active-duty Defense Department airfield in New England and one of Maine's largest employers, with nearly 4,900 military and civilian workers.

Before voting on additions, Chairman Anthony Principi cautioned that adding a base to the list "does not necessarily mean that the base will be realigned or closed" but will simply allow the panel to further analyze those bases' usefulness.

"Our deliberations today may add more bases for further consideration, not because we have determined that we need to close more bases than the secretary of defense has recommended, but because we want to make sure the best possible closure or realignment choices are made," Principi said.

In a reprieve for California, the commission voted against putting the Marine Corps Recruit Depot on the closure list even though several commissioners had wanted to consider merging it with the service's other recruiting facility in Parris Island, S.C.

The Naval Shipyard at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii also was saved, although by a slim margin. The vote was five in favor of adding it to the list and four against adding it. However, seven commissioners had to vote in the affirmative for it to be added.

Overall, the panel was expected to cast about a dozen votes Tuesday on whether to increase the number of facilities that may be closed or compressed in size.

The votes show the independent commission's willingness to diverge from the plan Rumsfeld submitted in May, when he proposed closing or reducing forces at 62 major domestic bases and hundreds of smaller installations from coast to coast.

The panel's actions were sure to ignite a new round of lobbying by communities whose military facilities were being target for possible closure or shrinkage.

The commission was slated to vote on whether to add to list for possible closure: Moody Air Force Base in Georgia; the Naval Master Jet Base Oceana in Virginia; and the Galena Airport Forward Operating Location in Alaska.

They also were voting on whether to consider shutting down, rather than simply scaling back forces as the Pentagon proposed, at Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina, and Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota. The Brunswick, Maine, Naval Air Station had been slated for downsizing but it now will be considered for closure, given the commission's vote.

Final decisions about the fate of bases on the list - including any added Tuesday - won't be made until next month.

The nine-member commission must send its list with any necessary revisions to the president in September.

Rumsfeld has proposed a sweeping restructuring that would close or reduce forces at 62 major domestic bases and hundreds of smaller installations. The first such effort in a decade, the reorganization is meant to save money and streamline operations of the four service branches.

At this stage, adding bases to the Pentagon's proposed list of closures or consolidations will allow the commission to conduct public hearings, visit those sites and collect data, in some situations to make direct comparisons with bases that perform similar missions and are slated for closure.

The commission also was to vote whether to consider merging the defense accounting services from three locations and the professional development education services from three locations. It also was voting to consider whether to create a joint medical command headquarters by merging operations at four facilities.

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

Commissioners also have expressed serious reservations with the Pentagon's plan to disband or move dozens of Air National Guard units. However, that issue was not slated to be voted on Tuesday and commissioners were working behind the scenes to determine what to do with that part of the proposal.

Local News Articles

Oceana In The Cross Hairs

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)
Dale Eisman
July 20, 2005

WASHINGTON — A federal commission added Oceana Naval Air Station to the military's list of endangered bases on Tuesday, voting to join in a Navy and Defense Department search for a new East Coast hub for the Navy's attack aircraft.

The 7-1 vote by the 2005 Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission stunned local and state officials and the area's congressional representatives, many of whom had predicted the commission would not put Oceana into the mix of bases being considered for closure.

It "came as a shock," said Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf.

However, U.S. Rep. Thelma Drake, R-2nd District, said the commission's action just means it's going to look more closely at whether to close Oceana.

A vote to actually decide the fate of the Virginia Beach base and its nearly 12,000 military and civilian workers could come before the end of August. The commission faces a Sept. 8 deadline for recommendations on 33 major base

closures and dozens of adjustments to existing bases.

Defense officials say the proposed closings nationwide will save \$50 billion over 20 years, money they want to invest in new weapons and higher salaries for troops, among other things.

Navy officials say closing Oceana would reduce those savings because the service would have to invest \$500 million or more to build a replacement base or refurbish an existing facility to accommodate Oceana's personnel and 244 aircraft. But, they argue, a new master jet base is necessary because Oceana is surrounded by development that limits its operations.

"No matter what, I am convinced the Navy will not close down Oceana and walk away," said Oberndorf, who watched Tuesday's brief discussion and vote from a seat in the rear of a crowded Senate hearing room. "They may put in other commands at a future date."

U.S. Sen. John W. Warner called the vote "very perplexing" and urged Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld to join in efforts to persuade the commission to spare Oceana.

The panel has decided to put the installation's future in question even as Oceana-based pilots are flying and training for combat in Iraq, Warner complained.

"How you suddenly throw this frightful situation on top of Oceana while she's doing combat operations, I know not," he said.

"This is an illogical, horrible proposal," said Sen. George F. Allen, who, like Warner, is a Republican.

In Richmond, Gov. Mark R. Warner, a Democrat, said the base closure commission made "wholesale additions and deletions from the list. This is unprecedented in prior BRAC processes." During a hearing earlier this month, the governor all but begged commission members for a chance to address questions about state and local support for retaining Oceana but none was asked.

Several commissioners said Tuesday they acted out of a desire to help the Navy deal with safety hazards and noise issues stemming from the growth of shopping centers and residential developments around the base, which was in the midst of farmland when it was created during World War II.

Oceana, Virginia Beach's largest employer, is now the military's busiest master jet base. The base records 220,000 take-offs and landings every year – an average of one every 150 seconds; an additional 100,000 take-offs and landings are conducted yearly at Fentress field, an auxiliary strip in Chesapeake.

The panel was told by its staff that over the past 30 years, the Navy has made repeated efforts to discourage development around the base, only to be ignored by the Virginia Beach City Council. When service officials asked the city to deny particular projects, the council overruled them 73 percent of the time.

“We’ve got to try to help the Navy figure out an answer to this, because we are ... going to have a major disaster at Oceana, sooner rather than later,” said retired Army Gen. James T. Hill, one of the commissioners. Development around the base is endangering the safety of Navy pilots and residents, he argued.

Oceana is “the most perplexing and complex issue that we face,” Hill added.

One independent analyst expressed doubt that Oceana will be on the commission's final closure list and argued that Tuesday's vote is simply an acknowledgment that the master jet base eventually needs to be replaced, not immediately closed.

“Everybody seems to recognize that Oceana's a problem, but it's not a problem BRAC is going to solve,” said Chris Hellman, a military policy analyst at the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation.

Hellman said if the commission were serious about closing Oceana, it would have added

Moody Air Force Base in Georgia to its list of bases to be realigned to help accommodate Oceana's closure.

In a July 1 letter to Rumsfeld, commission chairman Anthony Principi asked why the Pentagon didn't consider relocating Oceana's fighter squadrons to Moody, outside Valdosta, Ga., and moving Moody's rescue helicopters and other assets to a base in New Mexico.

“They weren't saying we want to close Oceana,” Hellman said. “They feel they can provide to the Navy information that will help them shape the answer to the bigger question, which is 'Where do you put your next naval master jet base?’”

In a letter to the commission last week and in testimony Monday, defense officials said they want to replace Oceana with a new “from the ground up” base elsewhere on the Eastern Seaboard but have concluded the job can't be completed within six years, the time limit for actions by the base closure commission.

“This is a huge, huge challenge,” said Commissioner Samuel Skinner, a former White House chief of staff. Because identifying a suitable alternative to Oceana is such a complex process, “I don't think we can get the answer we want” before the Sept. 8 deadline, Skinner initially suggested.

But after commission staffer Jim Hanna, who is overseeing the panel's review of Navy related issues, asserted that “there is an opportunity to at least come up with something useful” for the Navy's future examination of alternatives, Skinner supplied a critical seventh vote, the minimum needed to put Oceana on the list for consideration.

Commissioner James Bilbray, a former Nevada congressman, was the only member to oppose adding Oceana to the list. Commissioner Harold W. Gehman Jr., a retired admiral and local resident, did not vote and recused himself from discussion of all Virginia bases.

In Virginia Beach, Tuesday's vote seemed likely to set off a round of introspection and finger-

pointing among local officials, who have battled among themselves for years over various development proposals around the base.

“This was almost predictable,” said City Councilman Bob Dyer, who was elected on a pledge to protect the jet base. “What we’ve had over decades now was a culture of encroachment that led to reckless growth. Common sense should have prevailed, but didn’t.

“I haven’t given up hope, I’m just angry we got to this point,” Dyer said.

Oberndorf, a councilwoman for more than two decades, took pains after the vote to defend her record, saying she’s tried to protect the Navy’s interests. Some of her colleagues were more concerned about the rights of property owners, she said, and “were not convinced that the federal government or Congress had made any attempt to make moneys available to buy up the land outside the fence to protect Oceana.”

Hal Levenson, a spokesman for Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise, which has spearheaded efforts to limit operations at Oceana, said that “the city hasn’t protected” the base.

The base closure commission “did the right thing,” he said. “It will keep alive the process of trying to determine how best to address the very serious issues that face Oceana.”

Retired Rear Adm. Fred Metz of Virginia Beach, a former aviator and prominent supporter of Oceana, said he is disappointed more support for the base hasn’t been forthcoming from the city and community in recent months as the base closure hearings began. The Navy also has lost interest in defending the base, he complained.

“One of the things in the last six months or so that has been very obvious is that the Navy has been very negative toward Oceana, saying it was the most encroached base in the nation,” Metz said. “Nobody has brought out the pluses.”

Former U.S. Rep. Owen B. Pickett, a Virginia Beach lawyer who heads a commission working

to defend bases across Virginia, stressed that “the effort is not over. If the purpose is to save money, there may not be a near-solution to achieve that objective. They can’t just hang these aircraft on sky hooks.”

Panel Hints It May Save Shipyard N.E. base closings to get more study

Boston Globe (Boston, MA)

Bryan Bender

July 20, 2005

WASHINGTON -- The Base Realignment and Closure Commission yesterday vowed to reconsider the closing of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, as commissioners expressed alarm that New England would suffer disproportionately in the Pentagon's plan to shutter or downsize dozens of bases across the country.

At a public hearing to decide which bases need further study, commission members questioned the Navy's argument that it has more ship repair yards than it needs. Commissioners signaled they may decide to keep open the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and save its 4,400 jobs.

Commissioners also expressed concern that the Pentagon's base closing list will have a detrimental impact on New England, voting 8 to 1 to reassess the Pentagon recommendation to downsize Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine.

"I remain very concerned with the recommendations to close nearly all the remaining military facilities in New England," Anthony Principi, the panel's chairman, said at the meeting.

If the Pentagon plan is adopted, New England would suffer the biggest job loss of any region, losing nearly 14,500 workers out of the 29,000 that would be eliminated nationwide. Most of the region's losses would come from closing the Portsmouth shipyard and the New London Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Conn. Connecticut would lose about 8,600 jobs overall and Maine

6,900, making them the hardest-hit states in the country.

That military and economic impact was clearly on the minds of the commissioners yesterday.

The Pentagon is "virtually abandoning that area of the country," Principi said.

Added Commissioner Lloyd Newton, a retired Air Force general: "We feel very strongly that way, as well."

The commission voted yesterday to add several bases to the list of potential closings as it enters its most detailed deliberations, including Oceana Naval Air Station in Norfolk, Va., and Moody Air Force Base in Georgia. The commission also voted to reconsider plans to close 20 Defense Department accounting offices and consolidate them into three centers.

But Principi stressed that the moves did not mean the commission would ultimately recommend closing more bases than the Pentagon has sought. "Our deliberations today may add more bases for further consideration, not because we have determined that we need to close more bases than the secretary of defense has recommended, but because we want to make sure the best possible closure or realignment choices are made," he said.

Still, yesterday's deliberations demonstrated that the commission is prepared to make significant changes if it determines that the Pentagon used faulty data to support its recommendations.

For example, the commission voted to reconsider the fate of Brunswick. The Pentagon has proposed to move the Fifth Reconnaissance Wing at Brunswick to Jacksonville, Fla. The move would cut three-fourths of the Brunswick facility's workforce, or 2,400 jobs. The base is the second-largest employer in Maine.

The Navy did not recommend closing Brunswick entirely, because it said it needs to maintain some "strategic presence" in the area and may have to use the leftover infrastructure in the future. The commission has argued,

however, that the Pentagon would save four times as much money, or \$1 billion, if it shuttered the air station instead of downsizing it.

But the commission's decision to study the Brunswick recommendation further may not necessarily be bad news for the base. Commissioners raised the prospect that they might find that the base should remain as is or possibly even get additional missions.

Commissioner James Bilbray said Brunswick got "the worst of both worlds," because not only will the community lose thousands of jobs, but the land will remain in military custody and not be available for private redevelopment. He said he is prepared to ultimately vote to either leave the base alone or close it altogether.

Commissioner Harold Gehman, a retired Navy admiral, said the panel must determine what the Navy means when it says it needs to maintain at least some modest "strategic presence" at Brunswick air station. He suggested that the commission staff could ultimately find that it would make military sense to move additional military units to what he referred to as "the last remaining [active-duty] airfield in New England."

The fate of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is also unresolved.

The Pentagon, after reviewing the Navy's four shipyards, decided in May to close Portsmouth, instead of the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard in Hawaii, after concluding that the Portsmouth submarine repair facility is not needed. The Pentagon decided that there are already too many shipyards for a fleet that was downsized after the end of the Cold War. Pearl Harbor, while not as efficient in repairing ships as Portsmouth, was kept open because of its location closer to where the fleet operates most frequently.

The commission only garnered five votes, two shy of the needed seven, to add Pearl Harbor to the list yesterday. But there may not be sufficient reason to close any shipyards, Gehman said. "How much over-capacity is there really? .

. . I am not convinced that Portsmouth should be closed either."

Commissioner James T. Hill urged the Navy yesterday to provide data to determine how much extra shipyard capacity exists.

Pope Gets Second Look On Shift To Army

Fayetteville Observer (Fayetteville, NC)
Henry Cuningham
July 20, 2005

WASHINGTON - The Base Closure and Realignment Commission on Tuesday voted to take a closer look at a Pentagon proposal on the future of Pope Air Force Base, setting the stage for more visits and hearings before a final decision in late August.

"I felt that the end result was extremely positive," retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Paul Dordal said after the session concerning Pope.

"They opened it up for additional review, and that allows us to get additional input into them and explain it and clarify a little bit of the issues that exist."

The commission, which has been seeking input from states at regional hearings around the country, is the only body that can change the Pentagon's plan, which involves 222 recommendations.

The commission must report to the president by Sept. 8. The president and Congress can only accept or reject the entire plan as submitted.

"If anything happened today, I think it demonstrated that this commission knows what it's talking about and is not a rubber stamp," Chairman Anthony Principi said after the session on Capitol Hill.

"We are an independent check on the power of the secretary (of defense) to close and realign military bases."

Dordal, a former wing commander at Pope, has been representing Cumberland County with the commission.

Cumberland County officials say Pope should remain an Air Force base and keep its active-duty wing. Dordal said the Army lacks specialties - from handling munitions to fighting aircraft fires - that are needed at an Air Force base. He also said the active-duty wing provides the leadership and expertise needed when making rapid, large-scale deployments by Army forces at Fort Bragg.

The Pentagon on May 13 recommended turning Pope over to Fort Bragg and replacing the active-duty wing of Vietnam-era C-130s with a squadron of more modern C-130s, which now belong to National Guard and Air Force Reserve units in other states.

State governors and adjutants general have protested the possible loss of airplanes, which, they say, are needed for state emergency missions and Homeland Security requirements. BRAC commissioners, who are tasked with making decisions on real estate, have expressed frustration about trying to sort out conflicting claims on the nationwide redistribution of planes between active and reserve forces.

"Should there be any 130s there at all?" retired Navy Adm. Harold Gehman asked during the discussion. "With the great mix of hundreds of C-130s moving all over the country, why did we pick this one to make a big study of?"

Fort Bragg is home to the 82nd Airborne Division, the 18th Airborne Corps and U.S. Army Special Operations Command. Soldiers and cargo are loaded onto Air Force airplanes at Pope's Green Ramp for local airborne training, as well as overseas deployments. The airplanes come from bases throughout the United States.

"We don't know how this is going to play out," said Samuel Skinner, a commissioner and former secretary of transportation. "I understand they need the facility."

Mike Flinn, a senior analyst for the BRAC commission, recommended Tuesday that the reserve airplanes and squadron not be reassigned to Pope and that Pope be entirely turned over to the Army. The move would result in about 1,500 fewer people at the base, they said.

Retired Army Gen. James Hill said he initially supported closing Pope, but after listening to other commissioners he was willing to study the matter further.

"There is a great deal of confusion between the BRAC commissioners as to what the original recommendation proposed, as well as how the BRAC staff recommendation changed that," Dordal said.

The Pentagon also called for U.S. Army Forces Command and U.S. Army Reserve Command to be relocated to the Fort Bragg-Pope complex from Fort McPherson in Atlanta. If all of the Pentagon's recommendations are accepted, thousands of people would move in and out, but Cumberland County would gain about 180 people in the long run.

Georgia officials have protested the proposal, which would result in the closing of Fort McPherson and nearby Fort Gillem. The BRAC commissioners did not bring up that issue for discussion, however.

The proposal also calls for the 7th Special Forces Group to move from Fort Bragg to Eglin Air Force Base in Florida and the 23rd Fighter Group and its A-10 attack jets to move to Moody Air Force Base in Georgia. The commission also did not bring up those proposals for discussion.

"At least two commissioners will visit any installation that we add for further consideration," Principi said during the hearing. Community representatives will have the chance to testify in regional hearings.

In August, the commission will invite Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other officials to comment. Final decisions will be made during the week of Aug. 22.

The Plan

The Pentagon has recommended turning Pope over to Fort Bragg.

The active-duty wing of Vietnam-era C-130s would be replaced with a squadron of more modern C-130s.

The modern C-130s belong to National Guard and Air Force Reserve units in other states whose governors and adjutants are fighting the move.

Navy's Broadway Complex Added To Commission's Base-Closure List Decision sparing MCRD hailed by local officials

San Diego Union-Tribune (San Diego, CA)
Rick Rogers
July 20, 2005

A prime piece of San Diego real estate occupied by the Navy since the 1920s might very well become a waterfront tourist attraction, thanks to yesterday's vote by a federal commission to include the Broadway complex on the national base-closure list.

For two decades, San Diego officials have wanted to turn the 3 million-square-foot site at the North Embarcadero into a district of shops, restaurants, parks and high-rise housing.

"San Diego could finally realize the potential of its waterfront," said Peter Hall, president of the Centre City Development Corp., which is responsible for downtown development. "It's our front porch, and of course it is very critical."

Many of the county's business and legislative leaders, including Hall, also celebrated the commission's decision to spare Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego from closure or downsizing. In recent weeks, commissioners had asked the Pentagon why the Marine Corps needs two bases to train recruits when the other military branches have one each.

"Today was a very good day for San Diego," said Erik Bruvold, vice president of the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corp. The group is a prime advocate for maintaining the county's military operations, which contribute an estimated \$18 billion to the regional economy.

The Broadway complex serves as headquarters for Navy Region Southwest, which includes the Navy Readiness Command Southwest and the Fleet and Industrial Supply Center.

Under the Base Realignment and Closure process, or BRAC, the Navy would move its 1,085 workers from the three-building complex to another location in San Diego, most likely 32nd Street Naval Station. Such a shift would improve security by placing the headquarters within a more fortified area.

Afterward, the Navy could sell or lease the complex. Developers probably would be more comfortable with a sale, and the Navy would make more money, Bruvold said. Military experts and developers estimate the site's worth at \$150 million to \$350 million.

Anthony Principi, chairman of the base-closing commission, said a trade or sale of the Broadway complex "has the potential to be a win-win situation for San Diego."

Hall said he believes a 1992 agreement between the city and the federal government gives his agency sole control over the site's redevelopment. The North Embarcadero Visionary Plan lays out renovation proposals that together would cost roughly \$182 million.

Federal and San Diego officials have agreed on the proposed buildings, streets and other land-use measures for the site, Hall said.

"We don't have to deal with the Port Authority or the (state) Coastal Commission," he added. "I didn't say that we would not consult with them."

San Diego officials and the Navy probably won't begin negotiations until fall. The base-closure commission must finalize its list by late August,

then send it to President Bush and Congress for approval.

The commission voted 8-1 to add the Broadway complex to the BRAC list. In contrast, it decided to preserve MCRD on a 6-2 vote with one abstention. Every revision to the BRAC list required approval from at least seven of the nine commissioners.

Most of the commissioners agreed with the Marine Corps' argument that because it must process about 35,000 recruits every year to maintain its overwhelmingly young fighting force, it couldn't risk having only one boot camp.

"The Marines are our first line of defense. I think they should have the two (recruit) training centers," said commissioner James Hansen, a former Republican congressman from Utah.

The commissioners had considered moving MCRD's activities to the Marines' other recruit-training base at Parris Island, S.C.

Yesterday's votes on the San Diego sites were applauded by Rep. Susan Davis, D-San Diego, whose district includes both installations, and Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-El Cajon, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

Hunter said he tried to persuade several commissioners to change their views on closing the local recruit depot.

"I look at MCRD as the key; that was the point of my effort," he said. "In terms of national security and the impact on our community, MCRD was an enormous challenge. We had commissioners we knew were ready to close it. ... I finished work on that around midnight."

Davis, who was in the crowded Senate hearing room for the commission's meeting, said MCRD was "the source of the best Marines we have, and I don't think we would want to give that up."

Davis said she wasn't disturbed by the decision on the Broadway complex, although she doubted

that all of the operations could be moved without major expense.

In total, the commission voted to add more than a dozen facilities in eight states and the nation's capital to the hundreds that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld wants to close or shrink.

Besides the Broadway complex, the Naval Air Station in Brunswick, Maine, is now being targeted for shuttering. In addition, the Naval Master Jet Base at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia and Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina could be shut down or see even more staff reductions than the Pentagon had proposed.

The votes showed the independent commission's willingness to diverge somewhat from the cost-cutting plan Rumsfeld submitted in May, when he recommended closing or reducing forces at 62 major domestic bases and hundreds of smaller installations from coast to coast.

Principi said the commission's actions yesterday were not final but were intended to give its members time for greater scrutiny of the base structure through public hearings and visits to the sites slated for closing.

Today's BRAC vote could impact Vance

Enid News & Eagle (Enid, OK)

Jeff Mullin

July 19, 2005

Monday was a day for talk by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. Today will be a day for action.

At a hearing Monday in Washington, the nine-member board asked Defense Department officials to explain the reasons some bases were placed on the realignment and closure list issued May 13, and why some were left off.

Today the commission will vote whether or not to add any additional bases to the closure or realignment list.

Mike Cooper, chairman of Vance Development Authority and Oklahoma Strategic Military

Planning Commission, said one of today's decisions could possibly impact Vance Air Force Base.

Under Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's recommendations, Vance is slated not only to remain open but to pick up 99 new jobs — at least 93 military and six civilian.

Rumsfeld proposes moving an A-10 fighter wing from Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina to Moody AFB in Valdosta, Ga., then dividing Moody's pilot training mission among Vance, Columbus AFB in Mississippi and Laughlin AFB near Del Rio, Texas.

But BRAC commissioners are wondering why the Navy's Master Jet Base at Naval Air Station Oceana, Va., was not on the DoD's closure list, since NAS Oceana has significant encroachment issues. The commission is pondering moving Oceana's flight operations to Moody, then moving some of Moody's missions to Cannon AFB, N.M., which Rumsfeld recommended for closure.

"If they decide to add Oceana to the list, that will create a ripple effect," said Cooper. "I don't know what the impact would be. It could affect our realignment."

Adm. Robert Willard, vice chief of naval operations, asked the commission not to add NAS Oceana to its list, saying the base can continue to serve the Navy's East Coast fleet of aircraft until a planned new base becomes available.

Cooper said he planned to meet Monday evening with BRAC staff members and commissioners to discuss their thoughts about the fate of Oceana, Moody and Cannon.

He said there is little or no danger of Vance being added to the closure list.

"If they change one recommendation, who knows what kind of ripple effect it will have," said Cooper. "I don't know how much change will happen. But it's great to be in a better position than last time. It's better to be

defending our realignment rather than trying to get off the list.”

Vance was added to the BRAC closure list during the last round in 1995, but was removed from the final set of recommendations.

Cooper said one interesting aspect of Monday’s hearing was the General Accounting Office’s report on the BRAC recommendations. According to the GAO, 10 percent of bases recommended for closure or realignment would account for 70 percent of the savings expected from this BRAC round.

Any military facilities added to the list today would not necessarily be on the commission’s final list, which is due on President George W. Bush’s desk Sept. 8. The president then has until Sept. 23 to approve the list in its entirety or send it back to the commission for changes. If he approves the list, it goes to Congress. Congress then has 45 legislative days to consider the list. If it does nothing, the list automatically is approved.

Adding a base to the list requires approval of seven of the nine commissioners.

New Mexico officials begin another push to save Cannon

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Albuquerque, NM)
Mary Perea
July 20, 2005

New Mexico's congressional delegation and the Clovis group working to save Cannon Air Force Base were encouraged by the Base Closure and Realignment Commission's vote to study the Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia for closure or realignment.

The move fits within a scenario that could save Cannon.

"I'm very encouraged to see the action of the BRAC commission," said Chad Lydick, a Clovis businessman and a member of a committee supporting Cannon. "It shows me that they're

going to be independent in their thinking and in their action."

Lydick said the Committee of 50 in Clovis had been concerned that the BRAC commission would just go along with the recommendations released by the Department of Defense in mid-May that proposed closing Cannon.

Sens. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., and Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M., met with some of the BRAC commissioners following Tuesday's hearing in which the commission proposed adding military facilities in eight states and the nation's capital to the hundreds proposed by the Pentagon for realignment or closing.

The lawmakers again argued that the Defense Department erred in assessing Cannon's assets.

Earlier this month, the chairman of the BRAC commission, Anthony Principi, asked during a meeting in Clovis whether the department had considered relocating the Master Jet Base at Naval Air Station Oceana to Moody Air Force Base in Georgia and moving planes assigned to Moody to Cannon.

"The Oceana decision creates some possibly interesting scenarios related to Cannon's future," Domenici said after meeting with Commissioners Philip Coyle and retired U.S. Air Force Gen. Lloyd W. Newton. "But I don't believe our success will solely hinge on Oceana. We have just as good a chance now to convince at least five of the commissioners to keep Cannon as an asset in the Air Force arsenal."

It would take five of the nine commissioners to remove a base from the list.

The commission's recommendations are due by Sept. 8 to President Bush, who may accept or reject the entire list.

Gov. Bill Richardson said Cannon can stand on its own.

"The merits of Cannon Air Force Base to our national security are clear," Richardson said.

Bingaman said he's happy the commission wants to take a closer look at a plan that could benefit Cannon.

"But regardless of what happens to Oceana, it is my strong belief that Cannon should remain open on its own merits," he said. "That is the message we relayed to the commissioners today and will continue to press in the weeks to come."

Udall said he's glad the commission "will not blindly follow the DOD's recommendations."

Domenici, Udall and Bingaman said in a joint statement that they were assured the commissioners are looking at long-term implications of the 2005 closure and realignment list.

Coyle and Newton also assured the New Mexico lawmakers that the commission is carefully reviewing the apparent Air Force errors in assessing Cannon's value to the military, the opportunities for joint military training and negative economic impact on the Clovis area.

Commission votes to keep Grand Forks Base off closing list

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Grand Forks, ND)
Mary Clare Jalonick
July 20, 2005

The Base Closure and Realignment Commission has voted not to add Grand Forks Air Force Base to the Pentagon's list of closures, an indication the base probably will stay open.

Six of the nine commissioners voted against adding the base to the closure list. Seven votes were required to put it on the list.

"We have dodged another very serious bullet," said Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., after the vote. "This opens up a great opportunity for the future."

Gov. John Hoeven, who was in Washington for the commission meeting, said he is also thrilled

with the outcome. "It's more than just the economics, it's the relationships," he said of Grand Forks. "There are so many ties with the community."

Hoeven said that the fight is not over. "We will have to continue to work hard," he said.

A Pentagon plan released in May recommended that Grand Forks stay open but lose its air tanker mission and most of its personnel. Tuesday's vote was on whether to close, instead of realign, the base.

The commission, which makes the final decisions on base closings, will produce a final list of recommendations in the fall. The list then goes to the White House and Congress for up-or-down approval.

Several commissioners said they opposed closure and supported realignment because Air Force officials had made a strong case for bringing unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, to the base. The Pentagon has said that mission will come to Grand Forks once the air tankers are moved out.

"Clearly, moving the UAV mission there is important to that vision," said commissioner Lloyd Warren Newton, a retired Air Force general.

Before the vote, for the sake of the debate, staff on the commission presented a detailed argument in favor of closing Grand Forks.

The commission staff said Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, which the Pentagon has recommended for closure, has comparable military value scores for a UAV mission and a higher military value score for an air tanker mission. They also noted that Ellsworth has a similar strategic location to Grand Forks.

Commissioner Admiral Harold W. Gehman, Jr., a retired Navy admiral, argued for adding Grand Forks to the closing list so the commission could further compare it to Ellsworth.

"It seems to me the only way we can compare is by treating both bases the same," he said.

Gehman voted to add the base to the closure list, as did Sue Ellen Turner, a retired Air Force brigadier general, and former Republican Rep. James Hansen of Utah.

Air Force officials have said they changed their minds at the last minute about closing Grand Forks. Commission staff members said Tuesday that Grand Forks' recommendation was changed from closure to realignment on May 4, nine days before the Pentagon recommendations were released.

Gen. Michael Moseley, Air Force vice chief of staff, told the commission Monday 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. He also recommended that the Grand Forks base be considered for new tankers in 2010.

"I think that was the frosting on the cake when Gen. Moseley said that," said John Marshall, a Grand Forks attorney who has led the effort to save the base. "He set up and above and out on that one."

Marshall said he won't rest until the list is approved by President Bush.

"I'm thrilled to death," he said, "but it's the third quarter and we still have another quarter to go."

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.

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

Military installations in California, Maine and Virginia, among other states, were added to the Pentagon's list Tuesday.

Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., said Tuesday that Grand Forks is extremely fortunate not to have been added.

"If we hadn't gotten over this hurdle, it's likely the base would have been closed," he said.

"This is like winning the Super Bowl, only better," said Rep. Earl Pomeroy, D-N.D.

Doubts expressed about submarine base closure

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Washington DC)
Lolita C. Baldor
July 20, 2005

Members of the military base closing commission and a key Congress member expressed doubts Tuesday about plans to shut down the submarine base in Groton, Conn.

At a meeting to add bases to the list of facilities being considered for closure, the chairman of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission said New England is being hit hard by the proposals.

"I remain very concerned with the recommendations," Chairman Anthony Principi said.

Principi said the Pentagon's plans to close the submarine base, Otis Air National Guard base on Cape Cod and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine could result in the military "virtually abandoning that part of the country."

At the same time, House Armed Services Chairman Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., told The Associated Press Tuesday that he believes there is a good chance the commission will decide not to close Naval Submarine Base New London, which is in Groton.

"I think what they see is an increasing importance of undersea warfare and there's a

real partnership between the operators of these ships and the constructors of the ships," said Hunter, referring to submarine builder Electric Boat, which is also in Groton. "It's important to the country, and so I think they now have a better than 50 percent chance of surviving. I hope they do, and I'm going to weigh into that argument."

The Pentagon has recommended closing the Groton base and shifting submarines and personnel to bases in Virginia and Georgia.

Also Tuesday, Rep. Rob Simmons, R-Conn., who is also a member of the Armed Services Committee, wrote to Principi about Navy opposition to the proposed closure of the submarine base.

He said that Vice Adm. Kevin Cosgriff, who is deputy and chief of staff for the U.S. Fleet Forces Command, told him that closing the Groton base would limit the flexibility of the submarine fleet and hurt training, readiness and regular submarine maintenance.

Simmons said the proposal to close the submarine base was the only closure recommendation that the Fleet Forces Command opposed during discussions that ultimately was put on the list by the Pentagon.

The Fleet Forces Command is responsible for the overall coordination and oversight of the Navy's Atlantic and Pacific fleets.

BRAC panel votes today

NEW Bern Sun Journal (New Bern, NC)
Sue Book
July 19, 2005

The 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission votes today on whether to alter a defense department military installation closing list its staff defended at a Washington hearing Monday.

"We'll be there," said Hugh Overholt, counsel to Allies for Cherry Point's Tomorrow, after viewing Monday's BRAC Commission hearing

where DoD staff responded to a dozen questions submitted by BRAC Commission Chairman Anthony Principi.

Monday's testimony closely followed a July 14 response to Principi's letter that asked why Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, Va., was not targeted for closure and its planes sent to Moody Air Force Base near Valdosta, Ga.

"The testimony (Monday) was the Pentagon's defense of all the base closing initiatives," Overholt said.

ACT officials have lobbied for Oceana planes to be stationed at Cherry Point and for an outlying landing field where pilots can train.

"There is going to be a vote and it's going to be on Oceana," Overholt said, adding it could take six votes of the commission to change Oceana's status on the list.

Virginia residents have weighed in on the issue in large numbers, with a contingent of retired admirals stepping forward to support keeping Oceana open and Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise sounding off early and long about closing it down, but Monday backing down somewhat, asking for more deliberate consideration of realignment.

Meanwhile, a letter Friday from Gordon England, acting deputy secretary of defense and Navy secretary, pointed to a long-term solution of construction of a new master jet base, but the BRAC commission is not assigned to consider such action.

Depots got mentioned Monday in remarks from Assistant Marine Commandant Gen. William Nyland, a former Cherry Point commander who serves on a depot working group. He spoke to the need of keeping depots ready and tooled for a surge of work, a key BRAC military value criteria.

"He's a big advocate of Cherry Point so we're really on the table," said Overholt, referring to

efforts to reduce the 656 jobs to be cut at the Cherry Point NAVAIR depot.

BRAC recommendations must be sent to the president by Sept. 8, but a tentative date for the list is Aug. 24. The president may approve the list and pass it on to Congress by Sept. 23, or reject it entirely. Congress may approve it or deny it entirely, or do nothing, which would make it law.

Conrad says Grand Forks not expected on base closing list

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Washington DC)
Mary Clare Jalonick
July 19, 2005

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission is meeting to decide whether to add military bases to the Pentagon's recommended list of closures. Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., says he was told the Grand Forks Air Force Base will not be added to the closing list.

"We've had many threats to the future of the base, none more severe than this base closure round," Conrad said Tuesday. "This is a great victory for Grand Forks and the state of North Dakota.

"The commission members looked at the facts," he said. "They weren't a rubber stamp here."

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.

The Air Force has expressed "strong interest" in putting new tankers at the Grand Forks base, Conrad said. Those planes are scheduled for production by 2010, he said.

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 have defended Grand Forks, 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.

Conrad said Moseley's comments indicated the base may be in line for newly built tankers scheduled to be finished in five or six years.

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.

Arkansas delegation woos another BRAC commissioner to Texarkana

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (Little Rock, AR)
David Hammer
July 19, 2005

The Arkansas congressional delegation is determined to convince the commission considering military base closures to let

Texarkana's installations remain, one commissioner at a time.

Rep. Mike Ross and Sens. Blanche Lincoln and Mark Pryor, all D-Ark., along with Rep. Ralph Hall, R-Texas, met with Base Realignment and Closure commissioner James Hansen in Hall's Washington office Tuesday. Hansen, a former Utah congressman who was not able to make it for the official commission visit to Red River Army Depot and Lone Star Ammunition Plant last month, agreed to make the trip to Texarkana. A date has not been set.

"Most bases on the BRAC list get an official site visit and that's it," Ross said. "To get the chairman as well, that's huge. And now, we're beginning to make an impression on the commissioners to say the Department of Defense decision to close Red River was a bad one."

The BRAC Commission must decide which of the Defense Department's hundreds of base closures and job cuts to recommend to President Bush by Aug. 8. As with the last round of BRAC in 1995, Red River and Lone Star were originally slated for closure. The Arkansas and Texas delegations hope the BRAC Commission also repeats 1995 by taking the bases off the list.

"If the BRAC Commission holds true to its pledge to base its final decision on merit, then Red River and Lone Star should remain open," Lincoln said.

The delegations believe they are making inroads by appealing to each commissioner individually and by emphasizing how critical the bases are to producing and maintaining armored vehicles in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Our strategy is not to go to the commissioners whining about the loss of jobs because anywhere they close will lose jobs," Ross said. "We have to make an argument about military value. We did that with the official site visit, at the regional hearing in San Antonio and now, we're just going back one-on-one with each of the commissioners in search of the five we need to

get Red River Army Depot to get it removed from the BRAC list."

The Arkansas delegation has had more success drawing attention to Texarkana than to the 188th Fighter Wing in Fort Smith, Pryor said. Still, it was a coup to get BRAC Chairman Anthony Principi to visit the Fort Smith Air National Guard base on July 11, Pryor said.

James T. Hill of Florida, a retired Army general and former combatant commander of the U.S. Southern Command, and Sue Ellen Turner of Texas, a retired Air Force brigadier general and a member of the American Battle Monuments Commission, were in Texarkana for the official site visit.

Chairman Anthony Principi took a tour of Red River on July 10, driving through hundreds of damaged Humvees and Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

"I don't understand the transmission on the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, but it is supposedly immensely complex - they have to calibrate it down to a millionth of inch and Texarkana's the only facility that can do it, even though others have tried," Pryor said.

Ross said James H. Bilbray of Nevada, a former Army reservist and Democratic congressman, has agreed over the phone to visit.

That leaves four of the nine commissioners: Samuel Knox Skinner of Illinois, Harold W. Gehman Jr. of Virginia, Lloyd Warren Newton of Connecticut and Philip Coyle of California. Ross said he hasn't contacted any of them yet.

"I'd love for them to visit but at this point looking at a serious calendar issue, just not enough days left," Pryor said. "If they are going to travel anymore and can stop and look at the facilities, we'll do everything we can to accommodate them."

Commission votes against adding Pearl Harbor shipyard for closure

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Honolulu, HI)
Audrey McAvoy
July 19, 2005

A close vote by the base closure commission Tuesday kept the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard off a list of recommended military base closures.

Only five members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted to add the Hawaii facility to the list, short of the seven of the nine votes were required to include it.

Hawaii's congressional delegation and union leaders at the shipyard welcomed the decision, saying it was good not only for Hawaii but for U.S. security.

"We were able to demonstrate that the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard provides a huge boost to our military capability in the Asia-Pacific region," U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, said in a statement. "Without this capability, the fleet would simply fall far short in its mission of maintaining a stable environment in the Pacific."

Matt Hamilton, president of the Hawaii Federal Employees Metal Trades Council representing the shipyard's 15 labor unions, said word reached some workers by e-mail and was making its way around Tuesday morning.

"Everybody here is the shipyard is just delighted. It's quite a relief," Hamilton said. "I'm smiling for the first time in the last couple of weeks."

He added the decision was good for the country and not just the shipyard's workers.

"If we were closed down or slated for closure, what would that show to both our friends and our possible rivals in the west Pacific? It's good for the people in the shipyard of course, but it's also good for Hawaii and it's good for the nation," Hamilton said.

U.S. Rep. Neil Abercrombie, whose urban Honolulu district encompasses Pearl Harbor, said "the outcome reflects a lot of hard work by

folks in the community, the Department of Defense, and our Hawaii congressional delegation."

The base closure commission threw the future of the shipyard into question after Chairman Anthony Principi asked the Pentagon in a July 1 letter to justify why it recommended keeping the Pearl Harbor shipyard open while closing another shipyard on the Maine-New Hampshire border.

Setting in motion a review of whether to include the Hawaii shipyard on a closure list, the letter noted the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, scored higher than Pearl Harbor in terms of efficiency and military value.

The base-closing commission is considering whether to remove from or add to a May 13 list of bases the Pentagon wants to closure or realign to save money and streamline operations of the four service branches.

Final decisions about the fate of bases on the list - including any added Tuesday - won't be made until next month. The nine-member commission must send its list with any necessary revisions to President Bush in September.

On Tuesday, commissioners said they were not yet convinced the Maine shipyard should be closed even though they spared Pearl Harbor.

"The issue on Portsmouth is whether we need the capacity, and we will study that," said commission member and former Transportation Secretary Samuel Skinner.

Hawaii officials, including Gov. Linda Lingle and Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann, had launched a high-profile campaign to convince the commission to save the shipyard.

Lingle, Inouye, and other Hawaii leaders met with three of the BRAC commissioners in Washington, D.C., on Monday, outlining the facility's critical role to the defense of U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific and its advantages over the Maine shipyard.

Lingle sent the commission a letter explaining Pearl Harbor is a full-service facility that takes care of cruisers, destroyers, frigates, amphibious ships, and attack submarines while Portsmouth can only handle attack submarines.

The letter also said that Pearl Harbor has five dry-docks and is capable of accommodating an aircraft carrier, something Portsmouth is not equipped to do.

Maine, New Hampshire officials not shocked by actions

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Portland, ME)
David Sharp
July 19, 2005

Regional officials shrugged off an independent commission's decisions Tuesday to consider closing instead of downsizing Brunswick Naval Air Station while sparing a Hawaii facility that is one of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard's competitors.

While disconcerting, the decision to put the Brunswick Naval Air Station on the closing list demonstrates that commissioners agree with supporters' view that it doesn't make sense to maintain an active duty airfield without airplanes, Maine officials said.

And Maine and New Hampshire officials contend there's enough submarine work to keep afloat all existing public shipyards - including both Portsmouth and Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard.

"The challenge continues and we will not relent in forcefully presenting a fact-based argument to the commission in the days ahead," Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, said after the commission's meeting in Washington, D.C.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission's actions came after Chairman Anthony Principi questioned the Pentagon about its decision to scale back Brunswick Naval Air Station and its decision to target Portsmouth instead of Pearl Harbor.

The commission voted 8-1 to add Brunswick to the list of those being considered for closure, while the vote to spare Pearl Harbor was narrower. Five commissioners favored considering Pearl Harbor for closure, but seven votes were needed.

Maine and New Hampshire officials had gone to pains to point out that while they think Portsmouth is more efficient than the Pearl Harbor depot they think there is enough work to justify keeping all four public submarine yards open.

"I'm pleased they didn't put Pearl Harbor on the list. Now we'll go about our business of convincing them that Portsmouth Naval Shipyard shouldn't be on the list, either," said retired Navy Capt. William McDonough, a former Portsmouth commander.

The decision to put Brunswick on the closure list means that there will be a second visit by base closing commissioners to the facility. At least two commissioners will visit the base, Maine Gov. John Baldacci said from Augusta.

The Defense Department already rejected the Navy's request to close Brunswick because of its strategic location and Snowe said Brunswick supporters will continue to focus on its location. Closing the base would leave New England without an active duty military airfield.

"We need to have a base in the Northeast that can respond at a moment's notice," said Snowe, citing homeland security concerns.

Rick Tetrev, chairman of the Brunswick Naval Air Station Task Force, said his all-volunteer group will get to work Wednesday morning with a conference call with the congressional staffers and representatives of Baldacci's office.

"This is going to take a tremendous amount of work and we're on a short fuse," said Tetrev. "We're moving forward. We're not letting any time waste."

Meanwhile, the commission dealt a victory to the Defense Finance Accounting Center in northern Maine by deciding to consider all 26 of the nation's DFAS centers for closure.

The Pentagon had proposed consolidating the work at three regional centers in Denver, Indianapolis, and Columbus, Ohio. But the commission voted to add those locations to the list of bases under consideration, giving hope to center in Limestone.

Sen. Susan Collins, who hails from Aroostook County, said computer models created by experts assisting the Maine delegation show that the greatest cost savings would be obtained by expanding the Limestone facility, not closing it.

Carl Flora, president of the Loring Development Authority, said he was relieved to know that all DFAS centers are now on equal footing. "At least we have a fighting chance," he said from his home in Presque Isle.

Dayton, Columbus military facilities added to base-closing list

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Columbus, OH)
Erica Ryan
July 19, 2005

A defense finance office in Columbus with more than 2,000 workers and an 80-year-old Air Force graduate school near Dayton were added Tuesday to the Pentagon's list of proposed closings and consolidations of military facilities.

The commission reviewing the Pentagon's plan voted to include the Air Force Institute of Technology at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and the Defense Finance Accounting Services operation in Columbus among installations being considered for possible closure or realignment.

Commission Chairman Anthony Principi said adding a base to the list "does not necessarily mean that the base will be realigned or closed" but will allow the panel to further analyze those

bases' usefulness by visiting sites, collecting data and holding hearings.

In May, the Pentagon not only proposed to keep the Columbus finance operation open, but to add hundreds of jobs from other DFAS offices. The Columbus operation currently has 2,067 employees, who make payments to military contractors and vendors, provide accounting services for defense agencies and process travel payments for Pentagon employees.

The Dayton institute, which has 500 employees and more than 900 students, is the Air Force's graduate school of engineering and management. The school also offers continuing-education courses for the military and other federal workers in software engineering, data management, logistics and other disciplines.

The commission voted 8-0 to add the institute to the list along with the Naval Postgraduate School and the Defense Language Institute, both in Monterey, Calif.

Michael Gessel, of the Dayton Development Coalition who attended the hearing, said the commission discussed the possibility of combining the three institutions into a university of national defense studies. However, Gessel said the commission made it clear that it would keep all options open on where to locate such an institution.

"It's an opportunity for the Dayton region, but being on the BRAC list certainly has considerable risks," Gessel said.

The DFAS office is part of the Defense Supply Center in Columbus and suburban Whitehall. The site has 6,400 jobs overall.

In May, the Pentagon recommended the Defense Supply Center get 1,758 more jobs. Some of those jobs were to come from the Cleveland DFAS office, which the Pentagon recommended be shuttered and its 1,000 jobs shifted to other cities.

Steve Tugend, vice president of government relations for the Columbus Chamber of

Commerce, said moving the Columbus DFAS operation would be a double blow because the installation would lose its current workers as well as the ones it would have gained under the Pentagon's proposal.

Tugend said he is confident that the Columbus DFAS operation will impress commissioners if they visit.

"You're not going to find a better installation for DFAS than Columbus simply because how secure it is, how modern it is," Tugend said.

Over the past 80 years, more than 266,000 Defense Department personnel, including 30 astronauts, have attended Air Force Institute of Technology programs at Wright-Patterson, which has about 22,000 military and civilian workers.

Commission Chairman Anthony Principi has asked whether the institute could be moved to Monterey, Calif., and merge with a Naval postgraduate school there. Pentagon officials have said the site couldn't handle the influx of students that would need military health care and that the densely populated area couldn't accommodate the new facilities that would be needed.

Gessel said the institute is an important part of engineering training efforts in southwest Ohio, working closely with the University of Dayton and Wright State University.

"AFIT has been an integral part of the Dayton community for most of the 20th century," said Gessel, who is based in Washington. "It would be a significant loss to the community and its educational resources."

The school traces its history to 1919, as the Air School of Application at McCook Field in Dayton. When Congress created the Air Corps in 1926, the school was renamed the Air Corps Engineering School and moved to Wright Field. The school became the Air Force Institute of Technology in 1947, when the Air Force became a separate service.

Maj. Kurt Vogel, 38, of the Dayton suburb of Bellbrook, is working on his doctorate in astronautical engineering at the institute. He also got his masters there in the same major.

"Every time I've left AFIT I've left better equipped to do my job and hit the ground running," Vogel said. "That's our bread and butter - keeping a sharp edge on our technical skills. Our profession is more and more oriented to advanced technology."

Vogel said he likes that his instructors are all associated with the military and says he doesn't know what he would do if AFIT didn't exist.

Byrd pleased about views on Air Guard

Charleston Gazette (Charleston, WV)

Rick Steelhammer

July 19, 2005

Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., said he was happy to hear Base Realignment and Closure Commission members "express real reservations about many parts of Defense Secretary [Donald] Rumsfeld's base closure plans" during a BRAC commission hearing Monday in Washington, D.C.

Byrd said BRAC commissioners asked tough questions about Defense Department plans "to take aircraft away from Air National Guard bases across the country," including the 130th Airlift Wing in Charleston.

Other questions raised by the commissioners included whether Pentagon planners took into account the homeland security roles of the 30 Air National Guard bases earmarked for closure, Byrd said.

"The National Guard has an important role in homeland security," Byrd said, "and the importance of those missions should be reflected in the BRAC process. Yet, the Defense Department virtually ignored the homeland security missions of the Air Guard."

Byrd said the 130th Airlift Wing serves as the backbone of homeland security efforts not only

in West Virginia, but in 10 other states and the District of Columbia as well.

"The 130th will speed specialized response teams to the scene in the event of a terrorist attack with a biological, chemical or nuclear weapon," he said. "Without the 130th's pilots, crews and planes at the ready, these highly trained homeland security teams would be left waiting on the runway for a ride."

While Byrd said he was encouraged by the tough questions asked by BRAC commissioners on Monday, he added that the commission's work "is a long process, and I don't want to read too much into things. But I am confident that West Virginia's voice is being heard by the BRAC Commission."

The commission is scheduled to hold hearings today on the possible addition of bases to the closure and realignment list proposed by the Pentagon in May.

After that session, Byrd will meet in his office with members of the "Keep 'Em Flying" support group for the 130th to discuss future options.

In other BRAC developments, Army Lt. Gen. Steven Blum, the head of the National Guard Bureau, acknowledged that the Pentagon's BRAC recommendations, if implemented, would have a major impact on the Air Guard.

Since the recommendations involve cutbacks at 30 Air Guard flying units and would leave seven states with no aircraft at all, National Guard officials owe it to their members "to explain what the big picture is and how they fit into the big picture," Blum said in an interview with American Forces Press Service.

Blum said he supports the BRAC recommendations, calling them an important step toward shedding excess infrastructure and modernizing for the future, to create "a more efficient, cost-effective and capable force."

Although implementation of the changes will mean some Air Guard members will have to take new jobs or travel farther to train and drill,

"Nobody who wants to remain in the Air National Guard will lose an opportunity to serve in the Air National Guard because of BRAC," he said.

"We will try to give them lots of options so they can remain in uniform, remain in the service of their nation, even though it may not be doing the same job in exactly the same unit," Blum said. "And frankly, some of the jobs they are doing now are not what we need the Air Force to be doing in the future."

Under Pentagon recommendations to the BRAC Commission, the 130th Airlift Wing's eight C-130 aircraft would be taken from Yeager Airport and transferred to Pope Air Force Base near Fayetteville, N.C.

Vote could affect Parris Island depot

The State (Columbia, SC)

July 19, 2005

A vote today by the military base-closing commission could determine whether more Marine Corps recruits are headed to Parris Island.

The vote comes after some members of the base-closing panel questioned the Pentagon's decision not to close the Marine Corps' boot camp at San Diego.

"I'm having a hard time getting my hands around this," commissioner James Hansen, a former Utah congressman, said at a panel hearing Monday in Washington, D.C.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission is reviewing Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's recommendations to close or reduce forces at 62 major bases and hundreds of smaller installations to save money and streamline the armed services.

On July 1, commission chairman Anthony Principi wrote Rumsfeld, questioning the decision not to close the Marine boot camp in San Diego and consolidate all Marine recruit training at Parris Island.

Principi also questioned the Pentagon's reasons for closing or keeping open 11 other bases. Only the San Diego decision would affect South Carolina.

San Diego trains about 16,000 male Marine recruits a year; Parris Island trains about 19,000 recruits a year -- male and female.

Critics of the decision to keep the San Diego base open say there is enough room at the 8,000-acre Parris Island, in Beaufort County, to train all Marine recruits. They also note the Navy and Air Force each have just one site to train recruits.

However, even some Parris Island boosters question whether all Marine recruits should be trained there.

John Payne of the Beaufort Military Enhancement Commission, a retired Marine colonel, said Monday he does not believe consolidating all Marine training at Parris Island is a good idea. "The Marine Corps says it would be very difficult, and I believe what the headquarters of the Marine Corps says."

"I think the services that have adopted a one-site boot camp do very, very different recruit training," he said.

In response to Principi's letter, the Pentagon said consolidating all Marine training at Parris Island would limit the Corps' ability to expand and would cost \$570.1 million. A new set of hurricane-proof training facilities would have to be built at Parris Island to accommodate three Marine training battalions, the Pentagon said.

S.C. bases largely were winners when the base-closing list was released this spring. Columbia's Fort Jackson, Lower Richland's McEntire Joint National Guard Base and Sumter's Shaw Air Force Base all were tapped to expand, bringing about 1,800 jobs to the Midlands.

Charleston, though, was targeted to lose two facilities and some 1,100 jobs.

After voting today on whether to add bases to the Pentagon's initial closing list, the nine-member base-closing commission will conduct public hearings, visit sites and collect data to compare bases. Any base can be removed from the closing list when the commission meets again in August.

The final closing list is due to President Bush by Sept. 8. He then has two weeks to decide whether to accept or reject the panel's recommendations. If Bush accepts the list, it goes to Congress for final approval.

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes