

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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Department of Defense Releases

BRAC panel steers course of its own

Members tip disparities with Pentagon list
Air Force Times
Gordon Trowbridge
August 01, 2005

A base-closings list that just got a bit longer could get substantially shorter in the weeks to come.

As the Base Realignment and Closure Commission finished on July 19 with two days of hearings that placed a handful of new bases up for potential closing, its members also dropped broad hints they're ready to reject a number of the Pentagon's original proposals.

"I suspect we'll see some changes, more in the form of deletions than additions," said Christopher Hellman, a base-closure expert with the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation.

The commission will spend the next month holding regional hearings and visiting the bases it has added before returning to Washington in late August for final deliberations. Its finished report — including recommended closings and realignments — is due Sept. 8.

Changes the panel seems likely to consider include:

- New England, already hammered by closures in past rounds, would lose nearly all its remaining operational bases. Plans to close

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Maine, and Submarine Base New London, Conn., are among the most controversial on the list.

During hearings on possible additions, commissioners questioned whether the Navy has overestimated the excess capacity in its shipyards, and whether the Navy will cut its submarine force so deeply that New London could be abandoned.

But sociology, not security, may be decisive.

“I think it’s important for our nation that our military and society are close together,” said Anthony Principi, the panel’s chairman. “I think it’s important for democracy.”

“It’s abundantly clear that several members of the commission are unhappy with what happened in New England,” Hellman said. “The question is, which [bases] would they keep?”

- Proposed Air National Guard changes came under intense scrutiny during a July 18 hearing, but it’s unclear how or when the controversy may be resolved.

Several states have challenged the Pentagon’s authority to remove Guard flying units without approval from affected governors. One commissioner, retired Navy Adm. Harold Gehman, called the Guard recommendations “unworkable and unsatisfactory” and a violation of the base-closings law and other statutes.

But he, Principi and others also said it would be irresponsible to toss the plan out entirely.

“We’re heartened by some of the things we heard this week,” said John Goheen, a spokesman for the National Guard Association of the United States, which has opposed the recommendations. “But what will this mean? We don’t know.”

Air Force officials said they had not considered legal implications of the changes, and Michael Wynne, the Defense Department official overseeing the process, said the Pentagon believes the plan is legal. The BRAC

Commission nearly begged Air Force officials and the states to present a compromise plan, and a meeting of adjutants general from several states was scheduled for late July.

“Two things we know,” Hellman said. “One is the commission views this as an extremely important issue, and the other is that they’re not satisfied with the way it’s been handled.

“But I don’t think we’re any closer to a solution.”

- While commissioners have carefully avoided statements that might tip their hands on individual bases — and cautioned reporters not to read much into what few comments they have made — some in several affected communities said they are encouraged.

In a July 19 discussion on Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D., Principi mentioned that he had asked Gen. T. Michael Moseley, Air Force vice chief of staff, whether Grand Forks would be affected if the panel were to reject plans to close Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D.

And in previous hearings, Commissioner Phillip Coyle, an expert on defense research and development, has questioned wholesale moves of technically skilled workers from locations such as Fort Monmouth, N.J., and office space in Washington’s Virginia suburbs.

The law governing the commission makes removing bases from the list much easier than adding new ones — a reaction from lawmakers angry at previous commissions adding bases to the Pentagon’s list.

While removing a base requires only a majority of the nine-member panel, seven votes were needed to add bases for consideration at the July 19 hearing, and another seven will be required to include those bases on the final list.

The seven-vote requirement likely saved some bases from potential closure. Five commissioners voted to include Pearl Harbor’s shipyard for possible closing, falling short of the seven needed. Hellman said other bases likely

were not even targeted for addition because of time constraints and the super-majority required.

On the list

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission added these bases to its list July 19 for review and possible shuttering:

Master Jet Base, Oceana Naval Air Station, Va. Commissioners want staff to analyze possible options for relocating a base squeezed by encroaching development.

Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine. The Pentagon wants to remove planes but leave the base open; the panel will consider closing it entirely.

Pope Air Force Base, N.C. The Pentagon wants to merge Pope with Fort Bragg, but continue to base Air Force C-130s there; the panel will review that proposal.

Navy Broadway Complex, San Diego. The panel wants to look at selling off valuable downtown office space.

Galena Forward Operating Location, Alaska. The panel will consider moving this little-used air defense alert facility to Eielson Air Force Base.

Defense Language Institute, Naval Postgraduate School, Air Force Institute of Technology. Commissioners will consider putting the California and Ohio schools in one location.

Defense Finance and Accounting Service. The panel will review plans to consolidate 26 offices across the country into three.

Army, Navy, Air Force medical commands. Three offices in the Washington, D.C., area, plus Tricare Management Activity headquarters, could be merged.

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National News Articles

Shake-Up Of Air Guard Raises Ire

Plan included in base review

Liz Sidoti

Washington Times

August 2, 2005

A shake-up of dozens of Air National Guard units has emerged as the most contentious part of the Pentagon's proposal to close or restructure hundreds of military bases across the country.

States are suing over the issue. Lawmakers in both parties are griping. And the independent commission reviewing the overall proposal has serious concerns about the effect of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's Air Guard plan.

A major question about that plan also remains unresolved just weeks before the commission's September deadline to send its recommendations to President Bush: Does the law allow the Pentagon to move Air Guard units without the consent of state governors, who through their adjutants general share authority over the units with the president?

"This thing is amazing in its incompleteness and in the disruption that it has caused, the insecurity that it has caused. And, I'm just, frankly, appalled," said Rep. John Kline, Minnesota Republican.

Pennsylvania and Illinois have filed lawsuits to stop the Air Guard changes, arguing that the federal government is out of bounds because it failed to consult the states. Other states may join those suits.

"Unless the commission wants to see the entire process held up by a legal recourse ... my guess is that in all likelihood the Air Guard bases are going to be removed from the list" of proposed closures, said P.J. Crowley, a Clinton administration military adviser who is an analyst with the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank.

In May, Mr. Rumsfeld proposed shutting or consolidating 62 major U.S. military bases and

hundreds of smaller facilities, prompting lawmakers and communities to feverishly lobby the commission to spare their hometown facilities.

Only a fraction of the \$49 billion Mr. Rumsfeld says his plan will save in 20 years would come from the Air Guard reorganization. But the effect on the Air Guard would be dramatic.

With about 106,000 members, the Air Guard has units stationed at about 95 Air Force bases and separate Air Guard installations and on leased land at 78 civilian spots, including local airports.

Mr. Rumsfeld's proposal would shift people, equipment and aircraft at 54 sites where Air Guard units are stationed. Half would grow, with the rest slated for closure or downsizing, including many units that would continue to exist with no planes assigned to them.

The Pentagon says the Air Guard changes are part of an effort to reshape the Air Force "into more effective fighting units" by consolidating a force that is now "fragmented into small, inefficient units."

Lawmakers, states and commissioners worry about the potential effect of the Pentagon proposal on recruitment, retention and training, and question whether the Air Guard will be able to fulfill its homeland security mission.

Anthony J. Principi, the commission's chairman, has appealed to all involved groups "to work to a solution that best serves the interests of our national security and our country."

Mr. Principi has since scheduled an Aug. 11 hearing to address the Air Guard plan.

Local News Articles

BRAC Commissioners Tour Oceana

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)

Louis Hanson

August 2, 2005

VIRGINIA BEACH — After touring the Navy's busiest jet base Monday, federal commissioners

charged with closing unneeded military facilities hinted that progress has been made to keep Oceana Naval Air Station.

Commissioners also acknowledged the Navy's chief argument against closing the base: that right now, no other facility can replace Oceana as the master jet base on the East Coast.

Retired Gen. James T. Hill, a commissioner who last month voted to put Oceana on the list for potential closure, said military planners looked at several alternatives, and "they haven't found a viable one."

Anthony J. Principi, chairman of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission, warned that Virginia Beach must continue to work with the Navy to ensure the future of the base. Surrounding homes and businesses have limited training operations and posed safety concerns.

"It's clear that prior to 2003 there was tension between the Navy and the city of Virginia Beach," Principi said. But, he added, the two parties have begun to fight encroaching development together.

"A great deal has happened since 2003," he said.

Four members of the nine-member panel toured the Navy's East Coast fighter hub, joined by the state's highest elected officials. Afterward, the group offered varied impressions of the two-hour visit.

Commissioners stopped short of endorsing the base. But Virginia officials emerged from the tour optimistic that they had made their case.

U.S. Sen. John Warner said the Navy's presentation to commissioners was convincing that Oceana is needed. He joked that the commissioners should agree with the Navy.

Gov. Mark R. Warner said, "The message came loud and clear that there is no alternative for the Navy."

The Department of Defense is closing and realigning domestic bases to save money and better house and train the armed services for post-Cold War threats.

On July 19, the commission voted 7-1, with one abstention, to consider shutting Oceana because of encroachment. Many residents have also complained about jet noise, but the commission seemed more worried about the potential for accidents.

Creeping development has threatened the base in earlier rounds of base closures. It gained squadrons in the late 1990s, when the Defense Department closed Cecil Field in Jacksonville, Fla.

The Navy estimates it would cost \$1.7 billion to replace Oceana and Fentress Landing Field in Chesapeake. About 12,000 military and civilian employees work at the base, with a total payroll of \$773 million. It is home to 259 aircraft, mostly F/A-18 jets.

During an aerial tour, the commissioners and elected representatives peered at the rooftops of homes around the base and at nearby Lynnhaven Mall. At a briefing on the base, they quizzed Navy brass and pilots about the value and training at Oceana.

Principi said afterward that he heard different viewpoints from aviators about training at Oceana. One pilot, he said, noted that it was more difficult to train around the busy base, which has restrictions to address noise and safety concerns.

But Navy officials said the flight training was similar to other bases around the country and does not warrant limiting operations or closing the base, Principi said.

Hill said the commission wanted to study the Navy's recent comments that it ultimately seeks a new master jet base at an unspecified time and location.

"That's really why we're here today," he said.

Although the commission has no authority to approve a new base, it can influence what happens by its actions regarding Oceana.

Hill added that the city and state need to work more closely with the military if Oceana is to remain open.

Commissioner Samuel K. Skinner said the fact-finding mission "would also be a wake up call for the people of this area."

Retired Adm. Harold W. Gehman Jr. attended the briefings but did not speak publicly. Gehman, a Norfolk native and former vice chief of naval operations, recused himself from the earlier vote.

Advocates for the base emerged from the tour feeling buoyed.

U.S. Sen. George Allen said no other facility on East Coast can boast Oceana's attributes and that building a new base is unnecessary and expensive.

"My only regret is that we didn't have every single BRAC commissioner here," Allen said.

Added freshman U.S. Rep. Thelma Drake: "Oceana is the best place for this base."

But Hal Levenson, spokesman for the community group Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise, said the city leaders continued to make promises they have failed to keep in the past.

"Once this BRAC round is over, can the commissioners trust the city of Virginia Beach?" Levenson said. "I don't know how they could."

The full commission will convene Thursday and take testimony about Oceana. A decision of whether to recommend the base for closure or remove it from the list could come in late August.

Commission recommendations about Oceana and other bases around the nation will then go to President Bush.

Putting Best Foot Forward Commissioner checks out base

Wichita Falls Times Record News (Wichita, TX)

Michael Hines
August 2, 2005

Her affection for Wichita Falls just can't figure into the final decision a retired general makes about job losses at Sheppard Air Force Base, she said here Monday.

Sue Ellen Turner, who spent three years in the mid-'70s in the School of Health Care Sciences at the base, toured the installation as a member of the Base Realignment and Closure commission.

"Sheppard Air Force Base really does have a place in my heart," she said. "Will it influence anything? No. It can't."

The Pentagon has recommended cutting 2,600 jobs at the base by eliminating medical training that involves no patient contact and moving the program to San Antonio.

The BRAC commission's report will be given to President Bush by Sept. 8. Bush has until Sept. 23 to accept the list or send it back to the commission for revisions. Congress must vote either for or against the plan as an entire package later in the year.

Community members did not show up in great numbers to greet the general on Monday. Some estimates placed the number with signs and/or T-shirts touting the base at between 50 and 70 at one point on the route. Other estimates put the number in the hundreds scattered along Airport Drive. However, about 450 traveled to San Antonio two weeks ago to attend the BRAC commission's hearing and Wichita Falls' presentation.

Base and city officials conducted a tour of the base for Turner, who visited Sheppard as part of an information-gathering effort by the commission that will decide the fate of dozen of military installations around the country.

Turner arrived at 7 p.m. Sunday and began her tour at 8 a.m. Monday. The roughly three-hour visit included a look at medical training facilities. Members of the local Military Affairs Committee followed close behind Turner's vehicle, but had a little interaction with her. Kay Yeager, MAC chairwoman, said she was happy to have gotten the chance.

"We felt like we had to have that happen," she said. "I thought it went really well."

Tim Chase, president of the Board of Commerce & Industry, said the committee got a chance to present some new insights into the BRAC decisions. That information will also go before BRAC staff in Washington when MAC members meet with them. Chase declined to say what the data was or when the meeting would take place.

"We were able to give her a preview of what we'll be saying when we go to Washington," he said. "We don't have everything nailed down just yet."

Turner said she was also able to get some new insights into information relayed to her by BRAC staff members who toured the base earlier. Turner said she used her visit to look into data regarding moving missions from Sheppard and the costs of making those moves.

Under initial BRAC recommendations, Sheppard was expected to lose about 2,600 personnel directly, causing a total job-loss of 4,400 workers and possibly an economic wallop ranging from \$80 million to \$120 million. But other scenarios have put the loss at 1,700 jobs directly and 2,500 total for the community. That could mean an economic hit in the range of \$36 million to \$60 million.

Back in June, Commissioner James Hill was set to visit Sheppard, but mechanical problems on his plane forced him to cancel. So while BRAC staff arrived, Hill did not.

At that time, local leaders had urged residents to gather near the base to show their support.

Witnesses put the number of participants between 300 and 700 people.

City leaders once again asked residents to line the road to Municipal Airport at 11 a.m. Monday. The result wasn't as impressive this time, said John Snyder, a 35-year-old hospital employee.

"As many as came out last time and as many as went down to San Antonio (for a statewide meeting with BRAC), I thought there would have been a lot more," he said.

He and Shirley Dawson, 36-year-old cashier at the base, said 75 to 90 people showed. They both attended the first gathering. Despite this latest gathering's size, Dawson said she was still happy to go.

"It was worth it," she said.

Andrew Amaya, 34-year-old painter, endured a broken foot to drive 10 miles to attend, hitting the gas with one foot and braking with the other. When he arrived, he was underwhelmed.

"I didn't see that many people out here," he said. "I thought it would be packed."

He also knows what's at stake.

"What it would do is, most of these people are buying brand new houses. We're painting the brand new houses," he said. "If they stop buying the houses, we have no painting to do."

He was also disappointed at not getting to see Turner as she rode to the airport after her news conference. Snyder and Dawson got to glimpse Turner.

"It was really disappointing," Dawson said.

**Army Museum Drafted For Move
A Pentagon plan to consolidate bases would
move a longtime tourist attraction out of the
state.**

Baltimore Sun (Baltimore, MD)
Josh Mitchell

August 2, 2005

The biggest conventional bomb ever built stands balanced on its nose at the U.S. Army Ordnance Museum at Aberdeen Proving Ground.

Call it the world's biggest dud.

Built too heavy for any airplane to carry, the World War II-era T-12 is perhaps the biggest attraction at what was once one of the top tourist sites in northeastern Maryland. But now the bomb - and the thousands of tanks, assault rifles, grenades and other weapons at the museum - could be shipping out.

In one of the lesser noted elements of its plan to close dozens of major bases across the country, the Pentagon wants to move the ordnance museum to Fort Lee, Va., where several Army facilities would be consolidated.

Moving the museum would mark the end of a significant Harford County landmark whose popularity might have waned in recent years but which remains a significant resource for military research and development.

"There are some really one-of-a-kind pieces from World War I," said Harford County Executive David R. Craig, whose now-deceased uncle designed exhibits at the museum in the 1980s. "People don't understand what all that stuff is there for, how important it was for the Army."

The Pentagon's reorganization plan, under review and subject to approval by a federal commission, would greatly benefit Aberdeen Proving Ground. The post stands to see a net gain of more than 2,000 jobs, even with the proposed loss of the Ordnance Center and School, and officials seem resigned to the prospect of losing the museum if the proving ground gains in the long run.

"I join the Aberdeen community in my disappointment in seeing [the Ordnance Center and School] moved to Fort Lee," Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski said in a statement last month. "However, the primary economic impact of the

Pentagon's [Base Realignment and Closure Commission] recommendations on APG is the increase of nearly 5,000 jobs."

Meg Wloczewski, who manages the Harford County Tourism Council's visitor center, said the ordnance museum ranks among the county's top three tourist attractions. "To have it leave," she said, "that would be disappointing."

The museum has acquired thousands of artifacts from the U.S. military and other countries. No other place boasts the 43,600-pound T-12 bomb or the German K-5 railroad gun (aka "Anzio Annie"). It also is home to a rare, fully automatic 12-gauge shotgun.

"It is a piece of history and a piece of culture" unique to Aberdeen, said Wyatt Colclasure, president of the Army Alliance, a nonprofit group that works to strengthen Aberdeen Proving Ground's economic future. "That's the home of ordnance."

People used to come by the busload to the museum. But after the Sept. 11 attacks, Aberdeen Proving Ground was secured and closed to all but military personnel and Department of Defense civilians. The museum reopened to the public in the fall of 2002, and the number of visitors has gradually crept back up, though not near the average 200,000 people a year who once visited the museum.

Last year, 30,000 people visited. This year, the museum is on track to have 50,000 visitors, said museum director William F. Atwater.

Atwater has an explanation for the steep drop in visitors.

Before Sept. 11, 20 to 30 tour buses a day would visit the museum on their way to bigger destinations along the East Coast. Tour buses no longer visit the museum, save for the occasional bus being rented out for a reunion, such as the reunion of the Battle of Anzio veterans.

"When you can't get the tour buses aboard, you're not going to get the numbers," Atwater said. Atwater, a Vietnam veteran, said tour buses

no longer make trips to the museum because of the increased security measures - if one member of a tour group does not have government-issued identification, the bus must either turn around or leave the person at the gate.

But the museum is more than a tourist attraction, Atwater said. It is also a key research facility for engineers studying the evolution of military technology and developing new weapons.

Museum visits are part of the ordnance school's curriculum, which is why the museum would be forced to move with the school to Fort Lee, said Col. Kevin Smith, the center's chief of staff.

Atwater is not necessarily opposed to moving to Fort Lee. For years the museum has sought to raise money to build an indoor home for the tanks, which continually need to be restored, at a cost of about \$400,000 a year.

"If this move succeeds in getting a roof over it, I will be happy," Atwater said. "I'm spending a lot of taxpayers' money rehabbing this stuff." But he also fears the military could lose money if the museum moved. Some items could be damaged during a move and would be costly to repair, he said.

One such piece is the M-1921 self-propelled artillery piece - a tractor with a gun mounted on top - which the museum recently moved from a warehouse to its rehabilitation facility. "When we got it in, it quite literally collapsed," said Atwater, who has a doctorate in military history. Estimated cost to rebuild: \$45,000.

The museum's latest additions came from Iraq. They include a 12-foot shell for chemical bombs.

Another exhibit displays a Saddam Hussein painting and an Iraqi flag seized by troops from a presidential palace in Iraq.

On a given day, Atwater and his staff alternately greet high-school students conducting research and graying military veterans in search of a favorite weapon.

The museum has had some odd visitors over the years. There was the Australian man who came to the museum every day for six months, taking pictures and measuring artifacts. A machinist, he had planned to make models of the weapons back home, Atwater said.

On a recent afternoon, curator Ed Heasely pulled on white gloves and showed the fully automatic 12-gauge shotgun to about 20 visitors. The gun is so powerful that when its maker fired the first round, he broke his wrist. Heasely estimated its value at \$1 million.

"It's one of only eight in the world that I know of," Heasely told the crowd.

Charles Angalet of Delaware, visiting with his girlfriend, said he's fascinated by the progression of technology. He pointed out how the German Panzer I tank, first used in 1939 in Poland, quickly progressed to the behemoth German Panther. "Three years later the size is quintupled," he said.

Alan Killinger, a museum specialist in charge of restoring the weapons, said the museum has a place in the hearts of veterans. "When you're in combat, your weapon is an extension of your body," said Killinger, 56, who was awarded two Purple Hearts in Vietnam. "You eat with your weapon, you sleep with your weapon, because you never know when you'll need it."

Sub base supporters head to DC with new data

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (New Haven, CT)

Matt Apuzzo

August 02, 2005

Connecticut officials head to Washington on Tuesday armed with new financial calculations that they hope will persuade members of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission to keep the state's submarine base open.

It will be the last face-to-face meeting between Connecticut supporters and commission staffers. The team plans to argue that the Pentagon

underestimated the cost of closing the Groton submarine base and overestimated the amount its elimination would save.

John Markowicz, chairman of the state's effort to save the base, said one new calculation shows that the Pentagon earmarked \$39 million to haul a dry dock from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean to make up for the capacity lost by closing the Groton base. It's really a \$90 million job, he said.

The Pentagon also eliminated some jobs at Groton that don't really exist, and included those cuts in its cost-saving projections, said U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-Conn.

Tuesday's meeting will be the last time Connecticut's team can meet privately with commission staffers. There will be several public hearings with the nine-member commission before September, when it recommends which bases to close.

"It's a big meeting," said Simmons.

Simmons, along with U.S. Sens. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., and Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., spoke to members of the state's submarine base realignment team about the status of the effort.

Simmons said it is halftime and the game appears tied.

The Groton base provides more than 8,000 jobs and contributes billions of dollars to the state's economy.

Gina McCarthy, commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Protection, will attend Tuesday's meeting in Washington.

McCarthy has said the Pentagon drastically underestimated the cost of cleaning up decades of pollution at the base. The military has said it should cost about \$23 million to clean. The state believes it could be several times that.

The Groton base recently received an endorsement from eight retired admirals, who

wrote a letter to the BRAC commission, urging commissioners to keep the base open.

BRAC commissioner visits Sheppard Air Force Base

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Wichita Falls, TX)
Angela Brown
August 01, 2005

A member of the military base-closing commission on Monday toured one of her former posts, Sheppard Air Force Base, where proposed cuts would cost the city more than 4 percent of its jobs.

Ret. Brig. Gen. Sue Ellen Turner, who trained at Sheppard's School of Health Care Sciences in the late 1970s, said the base held a big place in her heart. But that will not influence her report to her fellow members of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission, she said.

"My job is to objectively look at all of the data that's presented to us and make a decision based on that, as opposed to my own personal opinion," Turner said Monday, adding that the base's medical training facility was outstanding and "state of the art."

Sheppard, home of the 82nd Training Wing and 80th Flying Training Wing, could lose up to 2,400 of its 22,000 positions, mostly students who train there, base officials said. The positions would be moved to Florida and San Antonio.

City leaders say more than 2,600 personnel at Sheppard plus nearly 1,800 more indirect jobs in the city would be gone. Some have said the economic loss would be at least \$80 million, but several city officials said Monday that they could not estimate the impact.

Sheppard is the largest employer in Wichita Falls, a city of about 105,000 residents near the Oklahoma border.

"There's a lot at stake for Sheppard Air Force Base, ... for the whole area," said Kay Yeager,

chairwoman of the city's Military Affairs Committee.

The cuts are part of a Defense Department proposal to close or restructure more than 60 major bases and hundreds of smaller installations to save billions and make the U.S. military more mobile.

The closure commission was appointed to do its own research and make recommendations to President Bush in September. Commission members are touring many bases on the list.

The Texas facilities proposed for closure are Naval Station Ingleside, Brooks City-Base in San Antonio, and the Red River Army Depot and Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant in Texarkana.

Thousands of residents from the Texas communities affected - including 450 from Wichita Falls - attended the commission's regional hearing in July in San Antonio, and city leaders made brief presentations. Wichita Falls leaders proposed adding training programs at Sheppard instead of cutting.

Members of the Wichita Falls Board of Commerce & Industry and other leaders also plan to visit Washington, D.C., soon to meet with base-closure commission members.

City leaders had asked residents to turn out in droves Monday along the road from the base to the airport, the route Turner took after touring Sheppard. About 300 people stood along the road, some holding signs saying "We Support Sheppard AFB."

Andrew Amaya, 34, went to show his support despite a broken leg and the morning heat climbing into the 90s. Amaya, a subcontractor for a Wichita Falls drywall and painting company, has done work at the base and fears a drop in his workload.

"If they lose those jobs, it would be a ghost town," Amaya said.

**Base closure hurts town
U.S. Base closure hits businesses, jobs hard in
Puerto Rico town**

Orlando Sentinel (Orlando, FL)

Matthew Hay Brown

August 01, 2005

CEIBA, Puerto Rico -- Linda Chan surveyed her restaurant and sighed. When she opened Rico City four years ago, its menu of dishes from her native China attracted dozens of lunchtime customers from the nearby U.S. Navy base at Roosevelt Roads.

Now it was 1 p.m. on a sultry weekday, and her place was empty. Another restaurant, a convenience store and a clothes shop were padlocked shut. There were few pedestrians, and more spaces than cars parked around the colonial central plaza.

The departure last year of the Navy -- and 6,000 employees and the \$300 million they pumped into the local economy annually -- has hit this sleepy community of 18,000 on the eastern tip of Puerto Rico hard. Public revenues are falling, unemployment is rising, residents are leaving -- and business such as Chan's are struggling to survive.

"There are no sailors, there are no families," Chan said in Spanish, her second language. "My business has fallen by half. At the same time, the water has gone up, the power has gone up."

Once a support base for invasions of the Dominican Republic, Grenada and Haiti, the Roosevelt Roads naval station was used in recent years to coordinate practice bombing of the nearby island of Vieques. Mass protests following the death of a security guard there in 1999 led the United States to end the air-sea-land exercises in 2003, and the Navy pulled out a year later.

Local and island officials have developed a plan for the 8,600-acre site that would include a science park and a micro-business incubator, a recreational marina and an 18-hole golf course, a passenger airport and a cruise-ship terminal. The

existing Navy hospital and school buildings would be converted to civilian use.

Fully developed, officials say, the plan could attract as many as 19,700 jobs. But to residents, such relief feels a long way off. The main local business association says 15 of Ceiba's 250 businesses have shut down as a result of the base closure, and 40 percent of those still operating are in trouble. Unemployment is as high as 20 percent, nearly twice the island average.

"We have to work here," Mayor Gilberto Camacho said. "And the most important factor is how much time it's going to take to develop this."

Some Puerto Ricans, particularly the island's independence supporters, cheered when the Navy lowered the flag over the 60-year-old base last April. But Camacho says the loss of jobs and revenues has affected the entire east coast of Puerto Rico.

"There were many persons that had houses to rent, not only in Ceiba, but also in Luquillo, Fajardo, Naguabo and Humacao, and they could generally get more money from the service members," he said. "Some units now are empty, and others are rented to people who are paying less."

"For the other part, the restaurants have lost substantially. And there have been losses for the people who gave services, such as mechanics and barbers. It has generated substantial unemployment."

The base closure also has generated funding problems for Camacho. The municipality faces a \$2 million revenue gap in its \$6.5 million budget. The island government has pledged to meet the shortfall for the first three years, but then Ceiba will be on its own.

Puerto Rico dodged another loss in May when Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld recommended to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission that Fort Buchanan remain open. The U.S. Army installation in the San Juan suburb of Guaynabo employs about 630 people

in the mobilization, readying and deployment of about 15,000 National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve troops from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Back in Ceiba, Samary Tirado loaded cans of soda into a refrigerated showcase at Guata's Panaderia y Cafeteria. The bakery and snack bar, which fronts on the central plaza, had seen fewer than a dozen customers per hour since opening that morning.

"The Americans used to eat a lot of sandwiches," said Tirado, a cashier. "Now it's the municipal workers and the tellers from the banks who maintain the business."

At Rico City, Chan already has let a cashier go and wonders how much longer she can continue to operate.

"It's difficult now," she said. "The government doesn't help . . . I need money."

**Selfridge to lose wing;
Air Force refuelers will transfer by '09 under
Pentagon plan**

Detroit Free Press (Detroit, MI)

John Masson

August 01, 2005

Orca, meet Moby Dick. Moby Dick, meet Orca.

Watching two giant airplanes coming together for an aerial refueling mission is like watching a couple of whales doing a slow-motion tango.

The movements of the aircraft, flying just 20 feet apart at 350 m.p.h. over the Ohio Valley last week, seemed stately.

But the crew of the KC135 Stratotanker, based at Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Harrison Township, said things aren't always what they seem aboard a plane that can weigh more than 320,000 pounds at takeoff.

"Take some turbulence, add in the nighttime, and it can get pretty sporty up here," said Master

Sgt. John English of Richmond, a Stratotanker refueling boom operator.

English, like other highly skilled reservists of Selfridge's 927th Air Refueling Wing, could be forced to learn some new tricks if the current round of military base closings and realignments runs its course.

As things now stand, the unit's KC135s are slated to be transferred from the Air Force Reserve to the Michigan Air National Guard by 2009.

English and the other members of the tanker's crew -- pilot Lt. Col. William Jenne, copilot Maj. Patrick Reed and boom operators English and Master Sgt. Johnny White -- have plenty of experience at coaxing the Stratotanker's retractable refueling boom into the waiting maws of aircraft ranging from massive B52 bombers to feisty F16 fighters.

White of Clay Township lay flat on his face on a special couch, facing the tail of the tanker. With his hands on a pair of joysticks, he looked like an overgrown kid playing a video game. Inches in front of his face were windows looking down, 26,000 feet to the Ohio River.

A bulbous C17 transport plane lumbered into view, practically filling the glass. White worked the joysticks to guide the boom over the C17's windshield. When he got the boom close enough, he extended its telescoping lower portion until it made contact with the other airplane.

Once the boom was in the C17's fuel receptacle, it locked in place and the fuel began flowing.

"We'll be loading 10,000 pounds of fuel," White said. At a rate of as much as 6,800 pounds per minute, that's "more gas in a minute than a car would use in a year," he said.

Some of the 927th Air Refueling Wing's eight tankers -- which bear nicknames like Phantom Phueler, High Octane and Hockeytown Express -- are scheduled to deploy to Turkey this fall to help fight the war against terror, according to

wing spokesman Eric Brian. Many of the unit's 1,000 or so members will be going, too.

But after the unit returns, Brian said, the Base Realignment and Closure process makes its future uncertain. If the Pentagon plan announced in May doesn't change, the tankers -- each of which is at least 40 years old -- will stay at Selfridge, but will be transferred by 2009 to the 127th Wing of the Michigan Air National Guard.

The Air Guard planes now at Selfridge -- F16 fighters and C130 cargo planes -- will fly off to other bases to be replaced by a group of 18 A10 Warthogs, 15 of which are now based in Battle Creek, Brian said.

And by sometime in 2009, the wing's personnel will be reassigned to MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa. Some may be able to transfer to the Air Guard or elsewhere in the Air Force Reserve.

Others will commute to drills in Florida, where an Air Force refueling wing will benefit from the experience of the 927th.

Simmons: Sub base isn't old, it's historic

Norwich Bulletin (Norwich, CT)

Ray Hackett

August 2, 2005

GROTON-- The Groton base is the nation's oldest submarine base and that appears to be working against efforts to keep it from being closed.

At nearly 100 years old, there is a perception that it is an "old base," antiquated and no longer needed. The state's congressional delegation plans to refute that concept in the coming weeks.

"It's not an old base, it's a historic base," U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, said Monday, "And it's a modern, state-of-the-art technological center of excellence. By using the term 'old,' they degrade the base and that's wrong."

Simmons, and Democratic U.S. Sens. Christopher J. Dodd and Joseph Lieberman toured the base Monday after meeting with Subbase Realignment Coalition members at their weekly meeting to discuss the state's strategy for the next three weeks.

Simmons specifically sought out a briefing from Navy officials regarding investments made at the base in the last five to 10 years. Dodd and Lieberman visited the Submarine School and the base Childhood Development Center.

Family support

The support facilities, especially those aimed at providing family support, are a critical component to retaining Navy personnel, the lawmakers said.

"It is probably the critical issue in the decisions families make," Dodd said during his tour of the childhood center. "It's hard to imagine any facility anywhere better than what we have here."

The Pentagon has recommended closing the Groton facility, transferring its submarine squadrons, submarine school and support operations to Kings Bay, Ga., and Norfolk, Va. Kings Bay is one of the newest submarine bases in the country, celebrating its 25th anniversary last year and is slated to receive one submarine squadron and the sub school.

Sub school

"The sub school is a remarkable facility built in the 1950s," Lieberman said, "that has the most modern systems that you'll find anywhere in the world."

Simmons said his briefing showed 40 percent of the facilities at the base were built after 1980, and that more than \$120 million in improvements have been at the Groton base in the last five to 10 years, not including another \$50 million earmarked for additional improvements now on hold pending resolution of the base closing process.

"What we need to do is make the (BRAC) commissioners aware of that," Simmons said.

"That's taxpayers' money that has been invested into this facility."

Opinions/ Editorials

N/A

Additional Notes