

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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August 5, 2005

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Navy's Top Admiral Says Oceana Has 'Robust Future'

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)

Dale Eisman

August 5, 2005

WASHINGTON — Oceana Naval Air Station has “a robust future” as the Navy’s East Coast fighter hub if state and local officials keep promises to limit further residential and commercial development around the Virginia Beach base, the service’s top admiral said Thursday.

“I need now, your Navy needs now, Naval Air Station Oceana,” Adm. Mike Mullen, the chief

of naval operations, told the federal base-closing commission.

The service “looked at alternatives and we studied other options. None of them made much sense,” he said.

Mullen’s remarks at a hearing of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission cheered state and local officials, who insisted they’re committed to cooperating with Navy demands that they limit development near Oceana.

“We’ve heard the shot across the bow,” Gov. Mark R. Warner told the panel.

The BRAC Commission voted in mid-July to add Oceana to a list of bases being considered for closure, sending shock waves through the Hampton Roads business and political establishment. More than 10,000 civilians and service members work at the base, making it a major economic engine for the region.

Oceana also is the Navy’s busiest air base, averaging one landing or takeoff every 150 seconds.

BRAC Chairman Anthony J. Principi called Mullen’s remarks “very, very important information” but said the commission will continue to study Oceana alternatives, including a revival of Cecil Field, a Navy air base in Florida that was closed in 1999.

“This is a serious issue because of the encroachment” on pilot training and other Oceana operations caused by development around the base, Principi said.

“Our commission is looking at other alternatives ... Whether there is one or not remains to be seen,” he said.

Principi defended the commission Thursday against suggestions by U.S. Sen. John W. Warner that commissioners or staffers have received but not disclosed critical information about Oceana from inside the Navy or the Defense Department.

Such contacts with the commission are required by law to be “transparent,” Sen. Warner said, so that advocates for the bases involved can examine and respond to information provided by the Pentagon.

Otherwise, “we have one hand tied behind our back,” he said.

Sen. Warner, at 78, usually the model of “Old Virginia” gentility, sounded more like a bare-knuckled political powerhouse as he lectured Principi on the BRAC law’s requirements for openness.

He also recalled his role, as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, in helping to write the law and defend the BRAC process to skeptical colleagues.

Sen. Warner said he’s asked a colleague, Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., who heads the Armed Services’ subcommittee on military readiness, to investigate the allegations.

Visibly stiffening in his chair, Principi said the commission “is committed to being open and transparent” and asserted that members “have been subjected to the most intense lobbying campaign in history” by congressmen intent on preserving local bases.

He later acknowledged having a private meeting concerning Oceana and other Navy base closing issues with Adm. Vern Clark, Mullen’s predecessor, and said the commission would make a record of their session public.

Mullen, who was making his first Capitol Hill appearance since taking the Navy’s helm two weeks ago, said he had been “troubled by a trend in local government in recent years to turn a blind eye to Navy concerns” about development around Oceana and other bases.

The commitment of Virginia Beach and Chesapeake officials to cooperate in implementing a Joint Land Use Study on the areas around Oceana and Fentress Field, a practice landing strip in southern Chesapeake,

“marks a point of departure” for both communities, Mullen said, and is “very encouraging.”

Mullen’s testimony seemed to back away from a letter sent to the panel last month by top defense officials who indicated that the Pentagon’s long-term goal is to replace Oceana with a new base elsewhere on the Eastern seaboard.

His focus is on replacing the Navy’s aging fleets of ships and aircraft, daunting objectives that will be even harder to achieve if the service is forced to spend \$1 billion or more to build a new air base, he later told reporters.

“I simply do not have the resources,” he said.

Hal Levenson, a spokesman for Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise, a Virginia Beach group that wants Oceana downsized, said the hearing demonstrated that “the Navy wants to kick this thing down the road. They do not want to deal with it now...

“Oceana is encroached beyond rehabilitation, and all of these representations to the contrary are silly,” Levenson added.

The Navy has tried to address the group’s complaints about jet noise and crash hazards around Oceana by pushing development of a new “outlying landing field” for pilot training in rural Washington County, N.C. A court challenge by landowners and environmentalists has slowed that project, leading Virginia officials to look for alternative sites in the Old Dominion.

The BRAC Commission on Thursday released a letter from Gov. Warner suggesting that the panel order the field placed at Ft. Pickett, a former Army base near Petersburg now used by the Virginia National Guard.

The commission also should study placing the field at another site, the Naval Support Activity Northwest Annex, Gov. Warner said. The annex sits on 3,600 acres along the Virginia-North Carolina border in southern Chesapeake.

Though Gov. Warner and Sens. Warner and George F. Allen stated that the hearing buttressed their argument that there is no viable alternative to Oceana, Principi said commission staffers will continue to investigate Cecil Field. He also left open the possibility that the panel will convene a new hearing to give Florida officials a chance to make their case for reviving the base, which was closed partly because of encroachment issues.

But Principi acknowledged that the commission, which must report to Congress and President Bush by Sept. 8 on Pentagon proposals to close about three dozen major bases across the country, is running out of time.

And Mullen told reporters that it will be “a real challenge if not impossible” to fully analyze cost and other issues associated with reviving Cecil Field before the commission’s deadline.

The base closing law requires that the recommendations be accepted or rejected as a package, a feature designed to take political deal making out of the process.

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, the president’s brother, has told the commission his state would return the Cecil Field property to the Pentagon and that it could be upgraded to serve the Navy’s needs for about

\$250 million, a fraction of the \$1.4 billion Mullen estimated Thursday would be needed to replace Oceana with a base built from scratch.

Virginia officials scoffed at Bush’s cost estimate Thursday. Navy officials who led them on an Oceana tour on Monday, including one who oversaw Cecil Field’s closing, were unanimous and unequivocal in their assertions that the Florida base would not be able to replace Oceana, they said.

Kings Bay Steps Up Its Offensive In BRAC Fight

Group undermines arguments to keep Groton base open
New London Day (New London, CT)

Robert A. Hamilton, Day Staff Writer
August 4, 2005

A group from Kings Bay, Ga., contends the Navy should be allowed to close the Naval Submarine Base in Groton because the undersea fleet could drop to as low as 30 boats, based on current building rates.

In a last-minute offensive before the federal base closure commission votes later this month, the Camden Partnership has submitted a white paper that seeks to dismiss Connecticut's arguments that Groton was rated too low in military value and closing the base would destroy a submarine center of excellence.

The Pentagon has said if the Groton base is closed, some of its submarines would move to a ballistic-missile submarine base in Kings Bay and others to Norfolk, Va.

The group's treatise accused Connecticut officials of "extreme emotion" in arguing that Groton, the birthplace of the U.S. submarine force, should not be closed.

"This is a rear-looking argument," the paper states. "As the Navy transforms to embrace new technology and concepts in order to meet future threats and develop the infrastructure required to support this future force, it needs to be forward-looking. We should continue to recognize the birthplace of the submarine force, but that recognition should not be at the expense of operational readiness and effectiveness."

"I think the thing to stress is, the opinions presented in that paper by the Camden Partnership are thoughts, speculation really, on why this recommendation might have been made," said Walter H. Yourstone, director of the group. "We're trying to understand the arguments."

But John C. Markowicz, chairman of the Subbase Realignment Coalition, a grass-roots group working to save the Groton base, said a host of retired admirals, including three former chiefs of Naval Operations, have condemned the Pentagon proposal.

"I think we've clearly demonstrated that Groton is, today, the model for how a center of excellence should be constructed," Markowicz said. "The suggestion by the Camden Partnership that it should be disassembled is specious at best."

Markowicz noted that when the coalition documented how the Navy underestimated the cost to build replacement infrastructure in Kings Bay, it relied on specific estimates of construction costs from a reputable industry group.

The Navy used a figure of \$211 per square foot for submarine school buildings, for instance, while industry experience is closer to \$325 per square foot. In addition, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's guidelines warn that soil conditions and the high water table in Kings Bay could add \$30 million to the cost.

The Camden Group's paper, on the other hand, is devoid of particulars, Markowicz noted — it says only that the Connecticut group expects construction costs to climb "because their experience is in New London (where) all costs are much higher."

He said he would hope the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission will "pay a little more attention to the facts, and to three- and four-star admirals with a much wider strategic perspective, and fewer parochial interests, than the Camden Partnership."

The Camden Partnership was formed as a Kings Bay save-the-base group last year, but since then has been an activist for the base-closure list, which would significantly bolster the southeast Georgia economy by moving thousands of sailors and six Groton-based submarines there.

Yourstone, a 1977 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and a retired submarine captain, commanded the Kings Bay base from 2000 to 2002 and worked as an executive assistant to the acting secretary of the Navy, H.T. Johnson, at the time that the base realignment and closure, or BRAC, rules were established. He said,

however, he said he had nothing to do with the process.

“I was specifically excluded from anything to do with base realignment and closures,” Yourstone said. “I had no input on BRAC questions, and in fact had no access — I didn't know what the questions were, nor the scoring criteria.”

But he has been one of Kings Bay's leading advocates in the BRAC process since his retirement, attending not only the base closure hearing in Georgia but the hearing in Boston as well, to listen to the Connecticut arguments.

Markowicz, the state's congressional delegation and Gov. M. Jodi Rell have all argued that the Navy seriously underestimated the military value of the Groton base by giving too little weight in areas that would favor Groton and too much weight to factors that favored Kings Bay.

Adjusting for those biases, the coalition contends, Groton would have scored so high in military value it would have made no sense to close it. But the partnership's paper contends one cannot recalculate the score for just one base.

“The military value analysis only has meaning when comparing like activities,” it states. “This type of analysis is only good to show the relative position of, in this case, bases on a scoring list. Taking one installation out, reworking the numbers without seeing what similar scoring changes would do to the other bases on the list is meaningless.”

“We agree — we got a raw deal, and if you correct it by rescoring all the bases we'd come out a lot better,” Markowicz said. “That's exactly what we think should be done. We think the military value calculation itself is flawed, and represents a substantial deviation from the BRAC criteria.”

But Markowicz rejects most other arguments in the partnership paper, particularly the estimate that the attack-submarine fleet could dip to as low as 30 boats, a lower number than even the most austere study suggests is safe.

“That argument reflects poorly on the people making it,” Markowicz said.

This summer at a hearing in Groton, the chief of the submarine force, Vice Adm. Charles Munns, said the Navy needs at least 54 going forward, and there is demand for many more.

Yourstone, however, said the count of 30 is based on the fact the Navy is building just one submarine a year, and it will be difficult to squeeze more than that out of its shipbuilding budget.

“The paper basically said if we continue to build one per year, we end up with 30 submarines,” he said. “It was not meant to be a force structure study, just a comment. It was not meant to be a statement supporting 30 submarines.”

The Connecticut delegation has also criticized the Navy proposal to “nest” submarines in Kings Bay and Norfolk, which would involve tying one submarine up alongside another at a pier, which makes it more difficult to bring supplies aboard or do maintenance.

The white paper suggests that most of the time, nesting would not be necessary, because submarines are out to sea so often.

“The Camden Partnership should take a closer look at the number of submarines that are in port in New London before Christmas and Thanksgiving before they make such erroneous statements,” Markowicz said. “Notice that they do not challenge that when nesting occurs, there is a significant disruption in the maintenance, repair and training activities of the submarines.”

The white paper also dismissed the Connecticut delegation's arguments that the environmental costs of cleaning up the Groton base will be so high that it would negate any potential savings.

In fact, the paper said, the Navy will have to incur those cleanup costs whether it stays or goes.

But that argument is inaccurate, Connecticut authorities contend. If the Navy continues to use

the base it can do some interim remediation and monitor contaminated sites to make sure the contamination does not spread, which represents a tiny fraction of the cleanup that would be required if the base is closed, under an agreement that the Navy has signed with the state.

Supporters of the Groton base have also argued the synergy between the base, the nearby Electric Boat shipyard that designs, builds and repairs submarines, and the Navy laboratory that develops advanced weapons and sensors in Newport, R.I., would be destroyed if Groton is closed.

The white paper contends, however, that the Navy BRAC recommendations are aimed at establishing "fleet concentration areas," where submarine, surface and aviation units will work together. Virginia is already home to those platforms, as is the Georgia-Florida border area.

"There are different types of synergy," Yourstone said. "The paper was just pointing out the apparent synergy that is created with fleet concentration areas, which was not included in the Connecticut delegation's presentation, (which) focused on the synergy of a submarine-focused view."

Denver Eyed For Enlarged DOD Office

Base closure group to vote on proposals after Aug. 8 hearing
Denver Rocky Mountain News (Denver, CO)
Deborah Frazier
August 5, 2005

A Defense Department financial office in Denver has empty offices that could be used to expand the facility, a base closure commissioner said Thursday.

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service, located at the old Lowry Air Force Base, is one of several facilities under review by the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission.

The empty offices could be filled by accountants, payroll personnel, technicians and

other specialists from similar offices, said commissioner Philip Coyle after a tour and briefing.

The finance office employs about 1,250 people who are responsible for pay and disbursements to military personnel.

The Pentagon wanted to consolidate finance offices across the county and recommended that DFAS offices in Ohio and Indiana be moved to the Denver facility.

But in July, the BRAC Commission voted to re-examine the viability of all DFAS offices, including Denver. The vote does not necessarily mean the local office will close. But it does mean the commission will look closely at the Denver operation in the ongoing effort to make the military more efficient.

"We learned a lot about the people here and the job they do," said Coyle, a senior adviser to the President of the Center for Defense Information and a defense consultant.

"They have the capacity to absorb workers from other sites," he said, showing a floor plan of the building with unused areas marked.

Coyle said commissioners will visit other installations on the closure list and then vote Aug. 24 on each of the recommendations.

Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., said he invited members of Colorado's congressional delegation, Denver's mayor and the governor to address the BRAC Commission at an Aug. 8 hearing in Monterey, Calif.

"This is our big chance to make the pitch," said Allard. "I am optimistic that once the BRAC hears what we have to say, the commissioners will realize it would be a mistake to move" the Denver DFAS.

Rep. Diana DeGette, D-Denver, whose district includes the DFAS center, said the Pentagon gave the facility top ranking in terms of military value.

"No one can take this process for granted," she said.

The BRAC Commission has asked good questions about the consolidation and Denver has excellent resources to expand the DFAS facility, said DeGette.

Senators propose new mission for Cannon

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Cannon Air Force Base, NM)

August 5, 2005

This eastern New Mexico air base would be home to the Defense Department's fledgling Airborne Laser program under a plan proposed by New Mexico's two senators.

Sens. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., sent a letter to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on Thursday, urging him to consider the option.

Cannon Air Force Base, near Clovis, is one of 33 major bases around the country targeted for closure as part of the Base Realignment and Closure process. The Pentagon has estimated it would save \$2.7 billion over 20 years by closing Cannon, costing the base's 2,385 military employees and 384 civilian jobs and about 2,000 more indirect jobs.

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

In their letter to Rumsfeld, the senators said the citizens of Clovis are hardworking people who have supported the Air Force for years.

"The base should not be closed," they wrote. "It seems to us that if the (laser) program needs a base, Cannon Air Force Base should be considered."

As part of the senators' plan, the laser program would include eight Boeing 747 aircraft and a chemical plant that needs to be located far from populated areas.

"A strategic asset like the Airborne Laser program is best suited in a rural area with plenty of airspace and sufficient infrastructure to support a significant amount of personnel and equipment," Domenici said Thursday. "It appears to me that Cannon Air Force Base would be a perfect fit."

Domenici cited the base's unrestricted flying conditions and strong support from the community.

Bingaman said by failing to take the laser program and Cannon into consideration, the Defense Department limits its options for the future deployment of national security assets.

"Cannon Air Force Base has all the amenities needed for this effort, including expansive airspace, modern and un-encroached facilities and ramp space," Bingaman said.

The senators said the management office for the laser program is currently located at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque and that housing operations at Cannon would give it access to the Air Force scientific community.

Utahns propose extending life of Deseret Chemical Depot

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (Salt Lake City, UT)

August 4, 2005

Utah's Republicans in Congress want to prolong the life of the Deseret Chemical Depot by having it dispose of conventional weapons after it finishes its mission of destroying chemical weapons.

"You could transform what's already there," Rep. Rob Bishop said Wednesday in an interview with the Washington bureau of The Salt Lake Tribune. "Rather than just tearing down the facility that you spent a billion dollars to put up, making it useful would keep jobs there and keep it (running)."

The Pentagon has recommended to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission that the incinerator near Tooele be torn down after it finishes destroying chemical weapons.

But in a letter last week to Anthony Principi, chairman of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, the Utah Republicans requested that commissioners leave open the option that Deseret's mission could be changed to dispose of aging shells, rockets and missile parts.

"This large investment should not be abandoned," they wrote. "It would be a more responsible use of taxpayer funds, as well as more environmentally friendly, to consider converting the chemical destruction plant to a conventional munitions disposal operation rather than completely dismantling and tearing down this facility."

The Utah members said a senior Pentagon official confirmed to them that work at the incinerator is far behind schedule and the earliest the chemical demolition could be completed is 2012. That is three years later than the Pentagon told Congress earlier this year.

To make the change, Congress would have to change the existing law, which calls for the incinerator to be decommissioned and torn down. It would also require renegotiating the existing agreement between the governor and the Army.

An Army Materiel Command report said there are about 397,000 tons of conventional munitions awaiting disposal. Existing defense facilities can dispose of a maximum of about 156,000 tons of weapons annually.

Bishop said the munitions are currently burned or detonated in the open, "which has its own environmental problems."

The Pentagon already recommended in its May report the closure of Hawthorne Army Depot in Nevada - where the munitions are currently disposed of - and relocating the storage and demilitarization functions to Tooele Army

Depot. The proposal has been met with strong resistance from the Hawthorne community.

The delegation's letter is attached to a 370-page engineering study commissioned by the Pentagon in 1991, which said it is technically possible, but could be costly to convert the incinerator.

Pentagon plan for Detroit Arsenal could provide more jobs

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Detroit, MI)
Ken Thomas
August 4, 2005

A Pentagon plan to streamline the nation's military bases could bring about 1,100 jobs to the Detroit Arsenal in Warren, several hundred more than originally anticipated, the federal base closing commission said Thursday.

The commission received written confirmation from the Army that the job gains at the Detroit Arsenal would exceed the original estimate of about 650 jobs under the Pentagon plan, said Robert McCreary, a commission spokesman.

The Pentagon plan released in May did not take into account about 450 administrative and staff positions that would be shifted from the Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois to the Michigan installation.

McCreary said Rock Island didn't include some information in a questionnaire that would have provided a better calculation of workers. He said the "more accurate numbers" reflect a potential shift of 1,100 jobs to Michigan.

The Defense Department proposal would make the Detroit Arsenal the military's pre-eminent center for automotive and ground vehicle research and development. Local supporters hailed the latest development.

"This is a big boost for Michigan if this happens," said Peggy Mazzara, president of the Macomb Chamber, which has lobbied on behalf of the arsenal.

The proposal is being reviewed by the Base Closure and Realignment Commission and will be voted on next month.

The arsenal, located near General Motors Corp.'s technical center, specializes in industrial production, research, development and engineering. It includes the Tank-Army Automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM), the Army's top organization for procuring and supplying military vehicles, such as tanks and Humvees, to troops.

When Samuel Skinner, a BRAC commissioner, visited the Detroit Arsenal last week, supporters of the facility told him it could accommodate the additional workers.

Mazzara said the area would have new housing and several floors of the arsenal have space for more workers. Skinner also saw the plans for a new building and the shifting of the parking lot, she said.

"This is something that has been in the works for a long, long time," Mazzara said.

Thom Hart, president of the Quad City Development Group, said his organization had suspected the miscalculation for some time. His group supports the arsenal, an island in the Mississippi River along the Illinois-Iowa border.

Officials in Illinois and Iowa have questioned the cost savings of shifting the arsenal's TACOM to Michigan, arguing the cost of building new offices and parking and training new staff would reduce any savings.

Hart said it would incur a one-time cost of at least \$100 million and cost \$3 million to \$5 million annually.

"If the goal here is economies and savings, we think they've missed the goal," Hart said.

GFAFB retention leaders ask for a new score;

Results could boost case to retain tanker mission

Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)
Elisa L. Rinehart
August 4, 2005

Grand Forks Air Force Base retention leaders asked the Department of Defense to recalculate the base's score for supporting tanker missions based on a new set of data, which showed that it should rank among the nation's top tanker bases.

Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., said the revised findings could convince the commission to retain a portion of the tanker fleet in Grand Forks. It also would argue for a post-BRAC decision in favor of designating Grand Forks as a bedding place for new tankers, he said.

But Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., said he is not so sure the BRAC Commission will reverse the Pentagon's decision.

"It's hard to say at this point," he said.

In a Base Realignment and Closure report released May 13, the Pentagon gave Grand Forks the lowest score for tanker operations. Under those Department of Defense's recommendations, the base would lose, in the worst-case scenario, 80 percent of its personnel and its tankers would be distributed to other military installations around the country.

The congressional delegation met with BRAC officials last week and asked them to recalculate military value scores known as MCI, or Military Capability Index, Conrad said.

The team pointed out facts and figures not considered in the initial data gathering process about the base's operations and infrastructure. The data later was processed through computerized programs.

"Many assumptions in those (computerized) models were wrong. In the first set of assumptions, they ignored the runway being repaired," Dorgan said.

The delegation's scoring system placed more weight on the base's proximity to air refueling points overseas a crucial detail emphasized in recent talks with the BRAC Commission, Conrad said.

"Measuring military value through distance to domestic refueling tracks (aerial highways where tankers gas up other airplanes) does not reflect the value of a base for deployments, by far the largest part of the current tanker operations," said Conrad in a supporting statement released Wednesday.

The delegation made this argument in its presentation to three members of the base-trimming panel when it visited Grand Forks on June 23. But the scores were never revisited and couldn't be used to make the case for keeping at least one squadron of 12 KC-135R Stratotankers in Grand Forks.

According to the new formula, Grand Forks moved from 40th among 174 bases to 19th in the Tanker Mission Capability Index, and from 6th to 3rd of the nation's seven active duty tanker bases, Conrad said.

Another flaw in the Air Force's analysis, the document said, is that it didn't take into account the role that local tankers play in supporting nuclear missions.

Grand Forks is well positioned to support B-2s from Whitman Air Force Base in Missouri and B-52s from Minot Air Force Base in Unified Command Plan missions. The UCP delineates the missions, responsibilities and geographic areas of the nation's combatant commands, Conrad said.

Halfway there

The final report is not due on the president's desk until Sept. 8, but commissioners voted against closing the base in a hearing held in Washington July 19. And though some base retention leaders considered it a victory, some experts said that nothing is certain until the President signs the bill.

The new concern is whether or not the tankers will stay in Grand Forks long enough to keep the spot warm for its successors.

Under the Pentagon recommendations, the tankers would depart by 2009. The new generation of tankers is scheduled to arrive on base in 2010, Conrad said.

Base retention leaders plan to send a letter to Anthony Principi, BRAC Commission chair, asking him to ensure that the final report provides for the construction of additional facilities to accommodate a larger-than-expected fleet of UAVs and other potential missions.

Dorgan said that the department of defense should maintain significant facilities open and operating rather than keep the base on standby for future missions, as the Pentagon recommended.

23,000 people say keep Willow Grove; That's how many signed petition to support military base.

Morning Call (Allentown, PA)

Pervaiz Shallwani

August 4, 2005

Horsham Township area business leaders have sent the Pentagon commission reviewing the proposed closing of Willow Grove Naval Air Station 23,000 signatures of people who want the base to stay open.

The petition is the most recent move by community leaders and politicians trying to convince the Base Realignment and Closure Commission that the Defense Department made a mistake when it put Willow Grove on the chopping block.

Gov. Ed Rendell, U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum and Ed Ebenbach, co-chairman of the local committee making the case for Willow Grove, met privately with the closure commission on Monday.

The meeting was the fourth time local leaders, Rendell and other politicians have met with the

commission since the Defense Department put the base on the closing list in May. The Suburban Horsham Willow Grove Chamber of Commerce has been gathering signatures for the petition since then.

The nine-member commission, led by former Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony J. Principi, has until Sept. 8 to present its recommendations to President Bush. If he accepts them, Congress would have 45 days to approve or reject them. But neither Bush nor Congress can make changes.

The petition, which was sent to the closure commission Monday, includes signatures collected by the Chamber, the Montgomery County offices of state Reps. Sue Cornell and Eugene McGill, both Republicans, and Josh Shapiro, a Democrat, and the Young Marines, an education and service program for boys and girls.

Chamber Vice President Ed Strouse said his group is done submitting its data to the commission.

"We feel very enthusiastically," Strouse said. "It is a waiting period. We need to wait until they make their decisions and submit them to the president later on."

Rendell spokesman Abe Amoros on Wednesday said the governor is encouraged.

"The hearings continue, and we have been providing more information to the commission," Amoros said. "We are encouraged that the commission continues to ask about more information."

The commissioners asked Rendell about the cost of moving planes to McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey, Amoros said.

Along with Rendell, business leaders have argued the military failed to recognize Willow Grove's military value as a joint reserve base where units of various service branches train together.

Willow Grove is home to the 913th Airlift Wing, which trains Air Force reservists to perform aerial resupply, and to the 111th Fighter Wing of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard, which flies A-10 tank-killers.

Closing Willow Grove would eliminate about 1,200 jobs, and the Pentagon projects a savings of \$710 million over 20 years.

BRAC probes housing project

Norwich Bulletin (Norwich, CT)

Ray Hackett

August 5, 2005

The Groton submarine base broke ground in February on a massive overhaul of its military base housing.

The Navy and GMH Military Housing LLC entered into a 50-year lease with plans to renovate more than 600 existing units and construct 1,200 new units at a cost of nearly \$300 million.

Three months after the work began, the Pentagon released its base closing list, targeting the Groton facility for closure. The independent Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission is now questioning that private-public partnership, asking if the base closure might result in a financial liability to the Navy that could reduce significantly any projected cost savings.

The Navy has responded by saying it would not.

"The fact that the commission is raising the question indicates there is some concern," Subbase Realignment Coalition Chairman John Markowicz said.

But how significant a concern it is, and how it might impact the commission's decision making regarding the Groton facility is unknown. The commission will begin its deliberations on a final base closing list in about two weeks.

Becoming an issue

The housing issue surfaced Thursday with the release of a July 19 commission staff letter to the Pentagon seeking information on the Navy's private housing partnerships. GMH and the Navy agreed to a 50-year lease, \$600 million deal in 2004 to improve housing at bases throughout the Northeast.

In the letter from Frank Cirillo, commission director of review and analysis, the Pentagon was asked specifically about the Northeast contract and agreements the Navy made to provide the private developer with services such as fire and police protection and utilities.

"The Navy entered into an agreement with Northeast Housing LLC to provide utilities and services at Portsmouth (N.H.), New London and Brunswick (Maine) until such time that the parties agree to discontinue those services," the Navy responded. "There is no government obligation to provide services on a continuing basis. The local municipality will eventually provide all services as they do to other privately owned housing."

The Navy also said its role as a limited partner in the partnership limits its liability to its initial contributions, and would not result in any additional costs if closure were to occur.

"I'm not sure what the legalities are, other than to say it is another example of the BRAC Commission doing its due diligence in looking at everything," Markowicz said.

**Jets headed south?
At Oceana Hearing, Closings Panel Ponders
Option In Florida**
Daily Press (Hampton Roads, VA)
David Lerman
August 5, 2005

Concerned about development around the naval air station, the base closing commission will look at reopening Cecil Field near Jackso

WASHINGTON -- The chairman of the federal base-closing commission said Thursday the panel wants to examine a former Florida airfield

as a possible replacement for Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach.

Anthony Principi, chairman of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, said he wants to study a proposal made this week by Florida Gov. Jeb Bush to reopen Cecil Field, a former naval air station near Jacksonville.

"I think we need to look at Cecil Field," Principi told reporters after a hearing on a proposal to close Oceana because of encroaching development.

It is not clear that the commission will have time to fully assess the viability of Cecil Field before decisions are made on Oceana and other bases later this month. But Principi said he intends to send staff members to Florida to examine the former base and was weighing a request from Bush that Florida officials be allowed to make a presentation to the commission in Washington next week.

Virginia officials who visited Oceana on Monday said they were assured by top-ranking Navy admirals that Cecil Field would not be a viable option, partly because of airspace restrictions.

Adm. Michael Mullen, the newly named chief of naval operations, stopped short of endorsing that view in a brief talk with reporters Thursday.

"I don't know enough about it," Mullen said. "This is a very serious issue and it needs to be looked at in detail."

In testimony before the commission, Mullen strongly backed the preservation of Oceana as the only viable master jet base for the foreseeable future on the East Coast.

Oceana, he said, ranked fifth out of 23 naval air stations in terms of military value. Home to more than 200 jet fighters, Oceana is Virginia Beach's largest employer, with about 12,000 military and civilian workers.

"We looked at alternatives and studied other options," Mullen said. "None of them made much sense."

While a new East Coast master jet base with unrestricted access would be ideal, he said, it would cost as much as \$2 billion and could not be built anytime soon. His top priority, he said, is rebuilding a dwindling fleet and replacing aging warplanes - not spending billions of dollars on a new airfield.

The Navy had considered closing Oceana and moving its jet fighters to Moody Air Force Base in Georgia, among other options. But the Navy found such a move would cost more than \$500 million, take significant time and fail to meet all requirements. Principi, who had asked the Navy for information about Moody, rejected the base as an option Thursday.

But the governor of Florida - and brother to President Bush - threw a new wrinkle into the debate this week by proposing an option the Navy had failed to consider: reopening Cecil Field.

"Cecil Field is the last site on the eastern seaboard capable of accommodating the NAS Oceana mission and personnel, and it offers relatively open surrounding land, close training airspace and bombing ranges, and in-place significant infrastructure," Bush wrote in a letter to Principi.

Virginia Gov. Mark Warner said Navy officials told him that Cecil Field, which was closed in 1993, is "absolutely not" a viable alternative to Oceana because of airspace encroachment.

"Once they delve into it, Oceana is going to compare very favorably to Cecil Field," agreed Sen. George Allen, R-Va.

The fate of Oceana was put in doubt July 19 when the commission added the Hampton Roads base as one of eight bases nationwide that it chose to consider for closure in addition to the Pentagon's list of recommendations.

Commissioners continued to express concern Thursday that the Virginia Beach master jet base - the nation's busiest - suffers from encroaching development that could hinder pilot training. The sprawling air base, carved out of farmland in the 1940s, now sits uneasily amid shopping centers and residential subdivisions.

Principi said he learned recently there are nearly 200 homes approved for construction in accident protection zones around Oceana, which the Navy would like to leave undeveloped. Development around the base, officials have acknowledged, has forced pilots to fly at higher altitudes than they normally would when landing on an aircraft carrier.

"This is a serious issue because of the encroachment and the impact it's having on the training of our pilots," Principi said.

State and Virginia Beach officials said new zoning restrictions were being put in place to better protect Oceana and would likely be strengthened as a result of the closure threat. "We've heard this shot across the bow," Gov. Warner said.

Sen. John W. Warner, R-Va., meanwhile, appeared to lay the groundwork for a possible legal challenge if Oceana is closed. Warner, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, directed one of his subcommittees to study whether the BRAC commission violated proper procedures by receiving information from a defense official that was not made part of the official record.

"Any deviation from these legal requirements clearly give rise to potential litigation that could delay or impede the BRAC process, or result in a federal court taking action that could call into question the integrity of the entire process," Warner wrote in a letter to Sen. John Ensign, R-Nevada, chairman of the Armed Services subcommittee on military readiness.

Principi appeared to bristle at the charge of impropriety at Thursday's hearing but pledged to investigate the matter.

Will 102nd become ANG wing without aircraft?

Upper Cape Codder (Cape Cod, MA)

Paul Gately

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The Base Realignment and Closure Commission has invited various state adjutant generals to a session in Washington, D.C. next Thursday where the Pentagon's recommendation for reassignment of Air National Guard units will be considered.

The 102nd Fighter Interceptor Wing on Otis ANG Base would have its aircraft shifted to New Jersey and Florida under current military recommendations being reviewed by BRAC.

Save Otis Coalition members said Wednesday that BRAC still expresses concern about the military impact on New England should 102nd aircraft head south. They said Anthony Principi, BRAC chairman, is particularly concerned about this aspect of the Otis recommendation.

Coalition members are also bracing for a possible U.S. Department of Justice legal ruling on Pentagon plans. Under the Constitution, the Pentagon cannot arbitrarily reassign National Guard units without the consent of governors. The military, however, argues it has unilateral authority to transfer Guard units and has asked the Justice Department for a ruling on that position.

Mark Forest, the Save Otis chairman and Cape Cod aide to U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, D-Quincy, said yesterday the Justice Department decision will likely be released when it is "convenient for those supporting a certain outcome" in the effort to realign bases across the country.

"The decision will probably be in strong support for the Pentagon's recommendations as they relate to the Guard," Forest said. "And I suspect the opinion probably will be released just before BRAC's decision-making to gain maximum impact."

BRAC legal staffers issued an opinion last month that challenged BRAC authority to shift Air National Guard units under the Base Closure Act. If that opinion stands, the 102nd aircraft ultimately might remain on Cape Cod. This opinion, however, prompted the Pentagon's request for Justice Department input.

The national association of state adjutant generals argues realignment of Air Guard equipment is not a valid item for BRAC review. Massachusetts Attorney General Thomas F. Reilly's office is also studying legal aspects of the Pentagon recommendation and any course the state might take should BRAC ultimately add the 102nd to the list of reassigned units.

Mass Development, meanwhile, is prepared to submit its report on the Pentagon recommendations for all of Massachusetts with special attention to the 102nd. The report goes to BRAC on Aug. 10, five days before the final date for input.

The Aug. 11 BRAC session will likely be cablecast on one of three C-SPAN outlets, including C-SPAN 3 available on the Internet.

Save Otis continues its letter-writing campaign to BRAC, accentuating two basic points: the 102nd has a homeland security role in New England; and the transfer of its aircraft would leave Otis base operations to other tenants on the Massachusetts Military Reservation that do not have budgets to cover additional missions. The savings the Pentagon now forecasts would thus be quickly negated.

Coalition members said yesterday they remain optimistic the Otis/102nd case has suitably been made and that BRAC has been listening; and that in the end BRAC will not let politics hold sway in its decision-making later this month. In this sphere, optimism reigns.

"You can't under-estimate the value of local input in something like this," Forest said. "The letters and the visibility on this count. It's a

factor in BRAC's thinking and decision-making."

Bourne Selectman Richard LaFarge said Tuesday night that "BRAC is not rolling over to the Pentagon." He said the commission is "challenging their premises and "reaching out to the Air Guard" for its arguments.

LaFarge said it has become clear that the Pentagon is merely trying to "realign the ANG" instead of trying to save money in military budgets.

The Pentagon, however, says the nation will be better served with ANG reassignments given progress in high technology and new ways of warfare. ANG units without aircraft would be relegated to enclaves with support elements in place of operational flight missions.

Save Otis members considered that point yesterday, saying ANG groups with aircraft might indeed be good for the Pentagon because it could help facilitate overseas deployments of support personnel but it would not be so great a designation for the ANG itself. Members agreed the Pentagon recommendations would simply lead to ANG wings without airplanes.

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes