

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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October 13, 2005

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Chamber briefs senator on BRAC preparations

Columbus Ledger-Enquirer (Columbus, GA)
Christopher Boyce
October 13, 2005

U.S. Sen. Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga., visited the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce late Wednesday afternoon as the Senate nears its final vote on the Department of Defense's Base Realignment and Closure plans.

The presentation was led by Biff Hadden, senior vice president for military affairs for the chamber. The chamber updated Chambliss on local preparations for the anticipated 16,000 soldiers and family members that BRAC eventually will bring to Fort Benning and the surrounding area.

With the Senate voting on BRAC expected to be completed within the next month, Chambliss said he could not be more pleased with Columbus' preparation.

"The soldiers are going to want to know about housing, schools, medical supplies..." Chambliss said, "and those questions are being addressed."

Officials visit Brunswick Naval Air Station airfield

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Brunswick, ME)
Clarke Canfield
October 12, 2005

Federal, state and town officials toured the Brunswick Naval Air Station on Wednesday as part of the town's efforts to decide if it should be used as an airport after the base closes.

Representatives from the Federal Aviation Authority, the Maine Department of Transportation and the town visited the base for three hours, where they were given a briefing by base officials.

Depending on the availability of funding, a feasibility study could be launched next spring to examine the airfield's facilities, the market, public sentiment and similar issues.

"Whether or not this will continue to be used as an airport is a tough question," said Assistant Town Manager Patricia Harrington.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted Aug. 24 to shut down Brunswick Naval Air Station as part of the military's massive reorganization. The closure is expected to be complete within six years.

Brunswick and Topsham are forming local redevelopment authorities to determine what the base should look like in the future. All of the 3,220-acre base is in Brunswick except 80 acres that are in Topsham.

Nobody knows for sure what the facility will be in the future, but it's been speculated that it will probably be a mix of uses that could include housing, business, offices, light industry, education and recreation.

The airfield portion of the base has two parallel 8,000-foot runways, three airplane hangars and a new air traffic control tower that is having \$5 million in new electronic and communications equipment installed in the next few months.

State House of Representatives Speaker John Richardson, who lives in Brunswick, said it's important to examine whether the airfield could be used as a military reserve facility, as well as for commercial cargo and passenger planes.

"Brunswick Naval Air Station, given its close proximity to coastal Maine, might be the perfect place to ship lobsters throughout the world," he said. "We need to be thinking along those lines."

Turning a closed military air base into a working airport isn't new. In Portsmouth, N.H., the Pease International Airport has operated at the former Pease Air Force Base since the base closed down in 1991.

The New Hampshire Air National Guard has used the airport for its KC-135 planes since the Air Force left, said Dave Mullen, deputy director of the Pease Development Authority.

At one time, the airport was also used by Atlantic Coast and Business Express commuter airlines and by an air freight company, Mullen said.

It is now used by Pan Am, which has temporarily suspended its flights. Allegiant Air, which is based in Las Vegas, will have scheduled flights between Pease and Orlando, Fla., beginning Oct. 28, Mullen said.

The facility also handles charter passenger planes on occasion, and has been used by airlines to park their planes.

Despite the variety of uses at the airport, the facility still runs a deficit of more than \$1.7 million a year, Mullen said. The gap is offset by other operations at Pease International Tradeport, which is the home to more than 200 businesses in addition to the airport.

Pennsylvania Auditor General Jack Wagner Urges Pentagon to Keep Open Willow Grove, Kelly Facility Commissaries;

Says Shopping Facilities Vital to 215,000
Military Personnel and Families
PR Newswire US (Harrisburg, PA)
October 12, 2005

HARRISBURG, Pa. -- Auditor General Jack Wagner said today that he has asked the U.S. Department of Defense Commissary Agency to keep open the commissary and post exchange at the Kelly Support Facility in Allegheny County and the naval exchange at Willow Grove in Montgomery County.

In a letter sent to Patrick Nixon, DeCA's chief executive officer, Wagner also asked DeCA to fast-track approval of the construction of a new commissary in Western Pennsylvania and to release funding already approved for construction of a new commissary at Willow Grove.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted in August to close the Kelly Support Facility and Willow Grove, along with the shopping outlets on both bases.

"It's unconscionable and unfair that our federal government would deprive more than 215,000 Pennsylvania military families of a vital service they depend on and have earned through their patriotic service to our nation," Wagner said. "This injustice must not stand."

Wagner said he is concerned that if the existing commissaries are closed, it will be difficult to get them reopened or to get DeCA to build new ones. Commissaries sell milk, meat, and other vital staples at discounts of 10 to 40 percent to active and retired military personnel and their families. Post and naval exchanges sell furniture, house wares and other products.

"There was no sound military, economic or political justification for BRAC's recent decision to close Willow Grove and the Kelly Support Facility," Wagner said. "It was a decision based on poor judgment or deliberate refusal to acknowledge the strategic value of both facilities. Nevertheless, as unsound as BRAC's judgment was, we need not compound its errors by depriving vital support services, like

commissary privileges, to Pennsylvania's military families. In a time of war, we must do all that we can to support both our veterans and our troops."

Wagner said the commissary closings would also deal a blow to Pennsylvania's economy. Many of the 45,000 military families who purchase products at the Naval Exchange at Willow Grove may drive or move to New Jersey to shop at the Fort Dix commissary. Military data indicate that military families spent about \$4.5 million shopping at the Willow Grove naval exchange last year.

DeCA had approved construction of a new 20,000-square-foot commissary for Willow Grove in 2003, but construction was delayed pending BRAC's decision on whether to keep the base open. Wagner asked Nixon to release funds and begin construction of a new commissary at Willow Grove, regardless of whether the base remains open.

"Thousands of military families in southeast Pennsylvania will continue to rely on commissary service at Willow Grove to help them stretch their paychecks and pensions even if aviation activity is reduced or eliminated," Wagner said.

More than 170,000 military personnel and their families spent about \$10.3 million last year at the Kelly Support Facility's commissary and post exchange. Wagner said that sales could rise by an additional 25 percent if a new commissary were built in Western Pennsylvania, on vacant land adjacent to the 99th Regional Readiness Command Headquarters in Moon.

Wagner and retired Maj. Gen. John G. Brosky, co-chairman of the Military Affairs Council of Western Pennsylvania, submitted a special 20-page report in July to BRAC, urging the Pentagon to preserve commissary service at the Kelly Support Facility and to construct a new commissary in Moon.

Maj. Gen. Jessica L. Wright, adjutant general at the Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs at Fort Indiantown Gap in Annville, Pa., supported

their effort by asking DeCA to appoint a commission to review and approve construction of a new commissary in Western Pennsylvania.

In his letter to Nixon, Wagner asked DeCA to convene that commission as soon as possible to approve a new commissary in Moon.

"If the Kelly Support Facility commissary is shut down, military families will be forced to drive 150 miles, to Carlisle or to Dayton, Ohio, to access the next nearest commissary," Wagner said. "That poses both an economic as well as a safety hardship to military families, especially to elderly retirees and those with disabilities."

Wagner, a military veteran who served in the Vietnam War, said he would continue to work with the Military Affairs Council of Western Pennsylvania, the Save Willow Grove task force, and other community leaders to preserve the commonwealth's military assets.

"Since Revolutionary times, Pennsylvania has been at the forefront of fighting for freedom and supporting our soldiers," Wagner said. "It's time we do it again. Benefits like commissary service are vital not only to retired veterans, they're just as important to our sons and daughters - and their families - who are serving today in Iraq and Afghanistan. We need to show them that we appreciate their sacrifice and will do whatever we can to make their lives a little easier."

Ellington family worries about gaps in defense

The Citizen (Houston, TX)
Phillip David Yates
October 12, 2005

The Base Realignment Commission has approved the gradual decommissioning of the 147th's aging F-16 fighter squadron.

As the F-16 fighter squadron prepares to leave, Ellington's military members have mixed feelings and opinions. "This is not a base closure," said M.Sgt. Cyndee Frank, a recruiter for Ellington Field. "When you're on the BRAC list, people think the worst. People forget the R in BRAC stands for realignment."

Ellington's grim fate has shifted from extinction to grandiose realignment, as the local base's 17, F-16s will be retired by 2007 and replaced with the unmanned Predator drones, a "new age" techno-weapon that, critics say, lack the versatility and menacing weapon arsenal of the F-16.

500 new airmen

According to present plans, Ellington will incorporate 500 new airmen into its ranks, skilled personnel capable of maintaining Ellington's newest aircraft. Unfortunately, the 147th's current crop of F-16 mechanics lack the training needed to operate the sophisticated Predator - leaving Ellington enlistees with three choices.

"They can transfer to a different F-16 unit, quit, or go back to school and continue to be a part of the Ellington Family," said Lt. Ramsey Hammad, head of public affairs for Ellington. "We expect to lose 300, but we'll still be netting a positive gain," Hammad said.

In fact, exponential expansion best describes Ellington Field's future. Ellington soon will host close to 3,000 Marines and Army personnel presently stationed at the Old Spanish Trail staging center - making Ellington Field "a true joint reserve base."

Defense gaps

But critics contend stripping Ellington of its F-16s will create air and sea defense gaps that no amount of Marines can fill.

The Pentagon recognizes the significant homeland defense role the 147th plays. Ellington's experienced F-16 fighter pilots safeguard Houston ports, chemical plants and oil refineries. So, in order to spackle Houston's defense cracks, the Pentagon ordained three National Air Guard units -from Fargo, N.D.; Fresno, Calif.; and Duluth, Minn. - to take turns protecting Houston, Hammad said.

The realignment of Ellington, some say, will ensure Ellington will constantly be stocked with a small contingent of combat ready F-16s, a proposition that, according to Hammad will ultimately be more costly than Ellington maintaining its own squadron of F-16s.

More costly

"The numbers just don't add up," he said. "This proposal will be more costly to the taxpayer in the long haul."

He added that coordinating the constant upheaval of multiple Guard units drains Air Force bases of personnel, resources and time. A clumsy calculation by a unit bent on saving money.

"It will cost more to operate small detachments out of Ellington than for us to operate our own detachment," Hammad said. Money aside, some worry that fighter pilots not trained in Houston will undoubtedly be unfamiliar with the Gulf Coast territory, leading to an increase in crucial reaction time.

With a minimal amount of F-16s rotating in and out of Ellington, flown by terrain blind pilots, Pentagon officials sincerely reassured "rightfully worried" Congressman Tom DeLay and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchinson that San Antonio could shield Houston in case of an emergency. "(Pentagon officials) assumed San Antonio could defend Houston," Hammad said "They assumed wrong."

San Antonio's F-16 squadron, the 82nd Training Wing, operates out of Kelly Air Force base. However, Kelly's F-16s remain for training purposes only.

During discussions, some BRAC members raised concerns about the age of Ellington's fleet.

Oldest planes

"Ellington and Fargo maintain the oldest F-16s in the Air Force," said M.Sgt. Craig Wiseman, an F-16 engine mechanic for the 147th.

Ellington's F-16s were constructed in the early 80s, accumulating a hefty 7,000 individual hours of flight time since then. The Air Force decommissions all aircraft that surpass 8,000 hours. So, "it stands to reason these are the fighters to go."

This is not the first major transition Ellington Field has endured.

"We've converted to a different mission three times since I've been here," Wiseman, the mechanic, said. And with the new generation of Lockheed Martin's superior F-35 Joint Strike fighters filtering into active duty units, "there is always a chance we can still get manned fighters in the future."

The Predator drones arrive June 2006, with this major transition scheduled for completion in 2009. Many military personnel and resources can expect reassignment. During this four-year evolution period, "it is possible for Washington to change its mind," Hammad said, adding, "It makes for better defense and a healthier budget for Ellington to maintain its own fighter squadron."

Expanded base mission on McConnell's agenda.

Refurbishing the KC-135 refueling fleet will start right away, and other training could be based in Wichita, officials say.

The Wichita Eagle (Wichita, KS)

Brent D. Wistrom

October 13, 2005

McConnell Air Force Base will begin refurbishing its aging fleet of KC-135 refueling planes as early as the end of October.

A base official and two Kansas congressmen said the base's future also could include training for operators of unmanned planes and an expansion of the Air National Guard's intelligence mission.

The announcements followed a base tour that brought together Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., Rep.

Todd Tiaht, R-Goddard, and new Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley.

Moseley was not available for comment, but Tiaht said Moseley is "anxious" to see McConnell's mission expand.

Refurbishing several dozen KC-135 planes is a top priority because of their role in wars and other operations overseas, Roberts said at a press conference arranged in front of a tanker plane that was refurbished in Washington.

"Down the road, we have to re-capitalize," he said. "This problem is going to do nothing but get worse."

All of the refueling planes flying out of McConnell were built in the 1950s, and they require constant maintenance, base spokesman Capt. Brus Vidal said.

Roberts offered no details on the potential expansion of the base's Air National Guard operations, but, he said, "we're going to make sure that it grows."

Roberts predicted that McConnell would become a center for work with unmanned planes and said the planes are "vital" to the war on terrorism. But he said there has been no confirmation of moving such training to Wichita.

The prospect of growth follows federal Base Realignment and Closure planning that promises as many as 522 new jobs at the base.

"BRAC was good news for us here," Tiaht said. "Now we're looking beyond BRAC."

Dayton avoids 'perfect storm' on BRAC Delphi bad enough, but what if DFSG had moved to Hanscom?

Dayton Daily News (Dayton, OH)
Timothy R. Gaffney

Imagine how the region would be reeling had the independent base-closing commission followed the Pentagon's recommendation to

move the Air Force's biggest information systems buyer to Massachusetts.

"It would have been the perfect storm," Dayton Development Coalition President and Chief Executive John P. Nauseef said prior to a breakfast forum Wednesday morning.

The forum, hosted by the Greater Dayton IT Alliance, offered a measure of what was at stake in the Defense Department's recommendation last May to relocate the Development Fielding and Systems Group to Hanscom Air Force Base in Boston.

Although not nearly as well known, DFSG, which buys information systems for the Air Force, is in the same major-employer league with Delphi, the auto parts maker that filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy Saturday. Delphi's filing put the future of its 5,700 local employees and five Dayton-area manufacturing plants in doubt.

In Wednesday's meeting, DFSG Director Debra Haley said her organization, together with related elements of the Operational Support Systems Wing at Wright-Patterson, accounts for 2,453 jobs. That includes 55 military, 429 Air Force

civilian, 627 on-base contractor support, and an estimated 1,342 contractor employees working on DFSG programs.

DFSG generates a \$40 million payroll and \$300 million in Dayton-area contracts, she said.

Counting indirect jobs resulting from DFSG's economic activity, Haley estimated the organization generates 6,240 Dayton-area jobs.

Just the uncertainty about DFSG's future during the BRAC process caused 53 people to quit, she said. The coalition led a successful campaign to convince the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to reject the Pentagon's recommendation to move DFSG, Nauseef said.

Now it's beginning to map a strategy for the region to support both military and commercial

information technology activities — and to make sure the region's IT capabilities are known.

During the BRAC process, "There just wasn't a great awareness or appreciation of all the IT that goes on in the Dayton community," Haley said.

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes