Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY BIRD

September 4, 2005

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With Closure List Announced, Defense CUs Are Sighing-Or Buying
Credit Union Journal
Scott Messmore
September 5, 2005

Reaction among defense credit unions to the latest Base Realignment and Closing Commission (BRAC) recommendations has been a predictable "let's wait and see what happens" and "we saw it coming." But some credit unions might be looking into property values in the near future.

Defense Credit Union Council President Roland Arteaga said credit unions should continue what they're doing as the BRAC process still has to be submitted to the president and approved by Congress. "We look at the BRAC process as having many steps," Arteaga said of the effort to shutter and consolidate military facilities.

But Arteaga also noted that while credit unions closely associated with military bases are in a holding pattern, it's definitely time to examine every possibility, including the ground beneath them. "If you're on the list now, you're basically 60% through the process," he said. "Start looking at the possibility of buying land."

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Many military CUs are located on U.S. government property and facilities and have neither property nor facilities of their own.

Most, if not all, base closure recommendations had been on previous lists, such as the historic Fort Monroe in Hampton, Va. Arteaga said he had a "gut feeling" Fort Monroe would be on the list this time.

Fort Monroe Credit Union President Michael Guida is already looking at acquiring land. Guida said his 6,000-member CU has its main branch off-post with a small, but very successful, branch at the Fort Monroe PX.

"I don't know at this point when the PX will close. It's way too early in the process to determine," he said.

Guida said to him BRAC stands for "Be Ready and Committed," and that he's going to stay focused on members and the soldiers his CU serves every day. Regardless of buying land or leasing an existing space, Guida said he's staying the credit union course.

"Fort Monroe Credit Union is not going anywhere, I can tell you that," he insisted.

In Groton, Conn., the community waged a major battle to save the nation's oldest submarine base. Even former President Jimmy Carter, a Navy man, got involved at one point. Charter Oak FCU SVP Rick Stout first landed in the community when his sailor father moved the family to Groton in 1949. The credit union was formerly known as Electric Boat FCU.

Stout said the local economy had been on hold while the BRAC commission made its decisions. With residents delaying major purchases such as new cars, Stout said he now expects a surge in spending before returning to normal. "You can't even begin to put a monetary value on what this means to our community," he said.

The sub base had been removed from the closure list in 1995 and was spared again after commissioners rejected a Pentagon plan to close it. Stout said it will be impossible to determine what the next 10 years would bring for the area but won't be surprised by another battle over the base. "Will it happen again? It probably will," Stout said.

Ashley Smith, marketing director for Navy Army FCU in Corpus Christi, Texas, said the credit union had converted to a community charter in early 2004 in recognition that Naval Air Station Corpus Christi might be shut down. "We've been preparing for it. We've known about it for a while and knew it might happen," she said.

Navy Army FCU had a branch on the air station and leased a smaller office space in anticipation. Smith said the $354-million CU has a diversified base serving 49,000 members.

Red River Army Depot in Texarkana, where Humvees, Bradley fighting vehicles and Patriot missile batteries are refurbished, was also spared. Red River EFCU President Robert Buck said the effort to save the base was full of anxiety and hard work. The $275-million CU held raffles, fish fries and even sold cookbooks to raise money for lobbyists and staff trips to Washington, D.C. Red River was removed from the 1995 list as it was deemed too valuable to national security.

"We're hoping everything is a done deal," he said. "It would have been severe for our area."

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

Local News Articles

Group Aims To Retain Naval Workers' Talent

Even if the fight to spare their Ventura County jobs fails, an effort is on to keep their skills in the local labor pool.

Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, CA)
Catherine Saillant

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September 4, 2005

While Naval Base Ventura County boosters fight the proposed transfer of jobs to China Lake, another group is drawing up plans for keeping highly skilled workers in the area should the restructuring take place.

Job placement, retraining and other support would be offered to 2,250 base scientists, engineers and other workers under a program just getting underway by the Workforce Investment Board of Ventura County, a job development group with federal, state and local job-training funding. The base supports about 17,000 government and civilian jobs.

After an analysis of the county's labor market, Workforce Investment will tap colleges, local governments and major businesses to assist in offering jobs and retraining displaced workers such as teachers, biotech workers, computer analysts and healthcare workers.

In a recent base survey, up to 80% of those slated for transfer said they would quit or retire rather than leave the area, said Elaine Crandall, executive director of Workforce Investment.

The goal is to help those people move into high-growth, high-wage jobs in Ventura County, she said.

"There may be folks taking this opportunity to reassess their lives," Crandall said: "Start their own businesses, retrain as teachers, take a new track.

"We want to keep them here while minimizing the potential negative effect of leaving those jobs," she said.

Crandall acknowledged that Workforce Investment's plan might be viewed as premature given that base advocates are still trying to reverse the Aug. 25 vote by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to transfer the jobs.

After review by President Bush, who can send it back to the commission for adjustment, the reorganization plan must go to Congress by Nov. 7.

But it is prudent to move forward with developing a plan just in case, Crandall said. Military officials say the jobs won't be transferred for four to six years.

"It's never to early to work on planning," she said. "If this restructuring really does happen, the effects on the community would be devastating."

Bill Simmons, campaign manager for the county's base closure task force, which opposed the transfer of jobs, said it did not see the job-training program as a threat. Now that the base closure panel has voted to move the jobs, defense downsizing is a reality, Simmons said.

"Those jobs are going through a continuous state of change," he said. Any time money becomes available for job training, he said, "it's a good thing."

Still, Simmons said, the local task force is continuing its effort to ease the effect of the base closure panel's decision, and in the months ahead, task force members will press legislators to persuade the Pentagon to "interpret" the decision in a way that will not cut so deeply into Ventura County's military work force.

"The fight now is to fight for every job," he said.

Much of the funding for the job-training programs will come from the state's employment division, Crandell said. But Workforce Investment hopes also to form partnerships with employers, cities and colleges for training and placement.

A major emphasis will be on moving skilled workers into jobs along the so-called biotech corridor straddling the Ventura Freeway in Thousand Oaks.

Biotechnology giant Amgen is based there and often needs scientists and engineers, she said. Attracting qualified candidates is difficult

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because of the region's housing costs. Home prices in July averaged $579,000.

"We have some homegrown talent right here at the ready," Crandall said.

Though the specifics have yet to be drawn, retraining for people in 2,760 private-sector jobs linked to the base would also be offered, she said.

The proposal includes paid and unpaid internships at local medical centers and a pre-apprenticeship program to teach construction skills.

The Sub Fight Below the Surface

The New York Times (New York, NY)
Robert A. Hamilton
September 4, 2005

When supporters of the submarine base in Groton fought to keep it open after the Pentagon recommended in May that it close, they attacked on several fronts. They developed detailed briefing books that showed that the region would be devastated economically, that environmental cleanup costs would be enormous, and that the base did not get a fair shake in the Pentagon review.

But when the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, the panel studying the issue, voted 7 to 1 on Aug. 24 to keep the base open, little of that mattered. What grabbed the attention of the committee was the issue of national defense. Closing the Groton base, officially known as the Naval Submarine Base New London, would weaken the United States, it said.

"Emerging regional threats that we face in the world today leave uncertain the force structure of nuclear powered submarines in the future," said Anthony J. Principi, the commission chairman. "We close New London down, we will never get it back. I think it would be a tragic mistake, a tragic loss to this nation, if this recommendation was to be approved."

Commissioners said their vote was a result of overwhelming evidence that the nation could not afford to lose the submarine-warfare expertise at the base and that some day the Navy might need more submarines, and they could end up in Groton.

Vice Adm. Albert H. Kontezni Jr., retired, a former commander of the Pacific submarine fleet, lobbied the commission to save the Groton base.

"Every one of those commissioners tried to understand the arguments that by closing those two installations you could relegate the submarine force to a much smaller size," he said, referring to Groton and to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Me. "At the end of the day, I think it was the security arguments that carried it. "

The Pentagon had proposed closing or consolidating 62 major military bases and 775 smaller installations. By its estimates, the closures would have saved $48.8 billion and made the remaining installations more efficient. The commission has since approved the closing of such venerable institutions as the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, while rejecting Pentagon recommendations on Groton and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

In an interview following the commission's vote, Mr. Principi said the importance of the Groton base was highlighted in testimony, letters and personal encounters with the political and military officials, including a host of retired Navy admirals.

"People whose opinions I respect very much convinced me it was the right thing to do," he said. "And when it's the right thing to do, it's an easy decision to reach. I understand there is excess capacity, particularly pier space. But it's difficult for me to understand why San Diego, for instance, might have a higher military ranking than New London."

"We gave it a lot of thought over the last several weeks," Mr. Principi said. "Believe me, there

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were a lot of painstaking discussions and deliberations on this recommendation."

Adm. Carlisle A. H. Trost, retired, a submariner who was chief of naval operations from July 1986 to June 1990, said he saw the decision as an endorsement of the importance of submarines. He said the Navy needs to double the production rate from one submarine a year, to two.

"I'm hoping it means the base is free and clear for years to come, and I hope it means the submarine force will enjoy a bit of resurgence," Admiral Trost said. "The fact that the force is slowly shrinking away doesn't concern people the way it should."

In fact, some of the commissioners said they were worried that the Pentagon was pulling too much out of the Northeast. The Defense Department's recommendations not only included closing the Groton and Portsmouth bases, but also closing the Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine and Otis Air National Guard Base in Massachusetts. The commission did vote to close both of those air bases.

The 687-acre Groton base, which is home to 17 attack submarines and the Naval Submarine School, would have shut down by 2011, with the school and one of the Groton submarine squadrons moving to Kings Bay, Ga., and two other squadrons and a repair depot moving to Norfolk, Va.

The Pentagon originally said it could save $1.6 billion over 20 years by closing the base, though the Government Accountability Office found in a review of a small part of the plan that those savings were overstated by at least $400 million. Opponents of closing the base contended that in the long run, the closing would cost the Navy money, particularly because of an environmental cleanup, which the state estimated would cost more than $125 million.

Some officials involved in the fight said the Navy undermined its own case by trying to characterize the base as old. The Navy has invested heavily in the Groton base, with $50 million in capital projects in this fiscal year alone. The five commissioners who visited the base said they were surprised to see it had some of the most modern infrastructure of any of the bases they had seen.

"The best way to sell the sub base is to tour the sub base, because you very clearly see it's not an 'elderly' facility," said John C. Markowicz, a retired Navy captain and chairman of the Subase Realignment Coalition, the grass-roots group that fought to save the base. "That really started sowing the seeds of doubt in the commissioners' minds."

Federal, state and local officials said the work that went into the other arguments was not wasted, because those other arguments helped sway the commissioners. They also said the Pentagon should now realize that the state will vigorously defend the base, as it had during threats to close it in the 1990's.

"I don't think we're going to see another BRAC round for quite a while," said Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, a Democrat of Connecticut, referring to the base realignment and closure commission. "It's been 10 years since the last one, and I think it will be more than 10 years before we'll see another one. And, having overturned two Pentagon recommendations to close the base, they're not going to do it again for a long time. We are now stronger than we were before, because the case was made so powerfully for it."

Loren B. Thompson, the chief operating officer of the Lexington Institute, a public-policy research group in Washington, said officials were not overstating the importance of the decision. Groton and the Portsmouth base, which repairs submarines, represented more than a third of the $7 billion the Navy expected to save if its recommendations were implemented.

"The base closure commission's lopsided vote to keep both Portsmouth and Groton open suggest a rather severe rebuff to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's advisers," Dr. Thompson said. "It would have been different if this had been a close vote, but it was not close at all, and it suggests a major problem with the way in

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which the Navy and the Pentagon have gone about thinking about rationalizing the base system."

Robert Gillcash, a defense analyst and senior adviser at McKenna Long & Aldridge, a consulting firm in Washington, said the commission's vote was a strong endorsement not only of submarines, but also of Groton's role in the future of submarine warfare.

"This was not the first attempt to shut Groton," Mr. Gillcash said. "And on each attempt, the facts that support keeping open the crown jewel and historic birthplace of maritime superiority have saved it."

911th saved, for now, but its future remains cloudy

Beaver County Times (Beaver County, PA)
Patrick O'Shea
September 4, 2005

MOON TWP. - The idea of keeping the 911th Air Force Reserve station open in Moon Township as a joint regional response center that would help with homeland security efforts and emergency medical missions such as sending aid to flooded New Orleans has mostly been applauded by the public, but a military watcher said Thursday he remains skeptical.

John Pike, director of GlobalSecurity.org, an Alexandria, Va., defense analysis firm, said Thursday the congressional Base Realignment and Closure Committee's decision to keep the 911th open as a homeland security facility was one of the moves that caused him to scratch his head.

"I'm not sure what this solves," he said, noting that the purpose of the BRAC process was to cut military costs, not increase them.

Pike said several decisions were made that were clearly the result of political wrangling in which Democrat members of the committee made deals with Republican members to protect one base in exchange for keeping another.

"I'm not saying that I am surprised or upset. That is the way it always has been, but to say politics was not involved would be an insult," Pike said.

With the three political leaders most involved in the fight for the 911th, U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum of Pittsburgh and U.S. Rep. Tim Murphy of Upper St. Clair Township, both Republicans, and Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, a Democrat, all facing serious challenges in the next election, it makes sense that they would do whatever possible to try to save the close to 2,000 jobs directly and indirectly attached to the 911th, Pike said.

Rendell acknowledged that a deal was struck for the 911th. He said Wednesday that supporters learned the night before the BRAC Commission made its announcement on Aug. 26 that they did not have the five votes needed to keep the 911th as a cargo-transport facility. So, the supporters pitched an idea that had been suggested by a recent study from Virginia think tank the Dupuy Institute that the complex link up with Pittsburgh-area medical centers and area anti-terrorism units.

Pike said other facilities had mentioned similar plans to get themselves off the Pentagon closure list, but the Pittsburgh region base was the only one successful.

Keith Dorman, a spokesman for the Pittsburgh BRAC Task Force, said the joint readiness center idea was accepted by the commission because Pittsburgh has a unique concentration of medical facilities and a lot of collaboration already is occurring.

Pike said the language on the proposal is so vague, however, that it is hard to tell exactly what the new mission for the 911th will be.

But the nebulousness of the language might let the 911th keep its options open, Pike said, noting the homeland security idea only has to serve as a placeholder.

He said regardless of what the BRAC Commission recommends to President Bush and Congress, the facility still is controlled by

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annual appropriations from the federal government.

So if legislators can find money, they can keep adding things to the base.

"As long as it remains open, it always is possible to finagle the process to place things there," Pike said.

In BRAC Battle, Markowicz Also Sought Help From On High

New London Day (New London, CT)
Robert A. Hamilton
September 4, 2005

When John Weyer approached John Markowicz a couple of months ago to ask what he could do to help overturn a Pentagon recommendation to close the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, the Subase Realignment Coalition that Marko-wicz chairs had assigned all the technical tasks to challenge it.

But there was one avenue of appeal that wasn't covered, Marko-wicz told him.

"Prayer would help," Markowicz told him. "That was during the dark ages. We weren't getting the data we needed from the Pentagon, and things were looking pretty bleak.

Within a few days, Weyer sent a letter to every church he could find listed in southeastern Connecticut, more than 100 in all, asking them for prayers to save the base. A surprising number complied, though some struck a bit of a compromise — they asked for a "fair and just" decision.

Weyer, who lives in Wilton but is developing The Ledges, a housing complex in Groton, said that wasn't inconsistent with what he requested.

"One of the things we asked for in the letter was for the truth to come out, as well as prayers for the submariners and their families," Weyer said. "I figured John wasn't able to give me particularly encouraging odds, so I figured I would turn to someone who might be able to help when no one else can.

"We can't figure all the angles, but He can," Weyer said with a smile.

Markowicz said he was pleasantly surprised when his own pastor, The Rev. Joseph Castaldi at St. Joseph's in New London, prayed for the base from the pulpit one Sunday.

"I think a lot of churches were praying already, so we just stepped it up a little bit," Weyer said.

Markowicz, a regular church-goer himself, said he certainly believes the prayer campaign helped. And, he said, he abandoned a non-partisan approach as the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission prepared for its final deliberations.

"I will admit, the Wednesday morning of the vote, I was praying for five votes," Markowicz said.

His answer: a 7-1 vote in favor of keeping the base open.

Now, Weyer has sent out a follow-up letter to the churches on his original mailing list, praising Markowicz and the coalition for their work, and passing on Markowicz' words on the day of the decision: "When you take on the largest defense establishment in the world and you win, then somebody up there must be on your side."

"You and your members were also a key part of that glorious moment through your prayers," Weyer wrote. "Please accept the deep gratitude of the Subase Realignment Coalition. Please continue to pray for the submariners and their families, and for all who are affected by the (base) and Electric Boat. Thank you so very much for your prayers and thanksgiving to God for this wonderful blessing."

Rising South Won't Help Balance The Military

New London Day (New London, CT)
Theodore Jakaboski

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September 4, 2005

Those steering the Navy and other defense forces have not the slightest clue as to the consequences that will inevitably flow from their campaign to shift military and naval bases and personnel to the states of the Old Confederacy, mainly at the expense of New England and the Middle Atlantic states. This is a trend that has gone on for some time, notwithstanding the recent, laudable decision of the Base Realignment and Closing Commission to keep open the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and the Sub Base in Groton.

The Aug. 15 issue of the Navy Times, in an article titled, "The Northeast goes South," refers to the trend of the past two decades to shift military resources to the South, for strategic reasons which are not invalid, but also for supposed reduction in the cost of maintaining bases and personnel.

The Pentagon bean counters appear, to this 74-year Old Salt, to lack the depth and breadth of wisdom to realize how their tries at social engineering are doomed to backfire. The ultimate winner will be China, as the wind blown from the Nor'east to South means withdrawal from the cradle not only of the U.S. Navy but of the military in general.

There is even a surface paradox which escapes our defense sages, namely that at the same time modern warfare demands ever higher levels of education for both officers and enlisted, the Northeast and Middle Atlantic areas have many times more than their share of outstanding institutions of higher education. Having served on the Board of Education in the premier city of Stamford, Conn., I can vouch for the superior education every child in Connecticut has free access to. I love the South, and currently reside in Texas, which some consider to be in the South, but I'm sorry, Good 'Ol Boys, you have problems in this department.

Unintended consequences

Is there a campaign afoot to dumb down the Navy? That could be one of the unintended consequences.

Other unintended consequences could involve a lowering of the percentage of new recruits from the Northeast. The region previously mocked as the "Rust Belt," has morphed into high-tech industry. The Eastern and Southern European immigrants who once were drawn to the smelters and mills, now take advantage of the region's educational power, and thrive on the cutting edges of various technologies. The same is true of African Americans who once migrated North from the South. America will lose as fewer Northerners consider joining the military as a career.

Although it is denied, one cannot rule out political motives concerning this trend. This is another piece of stupidity, if true. The ethnic groups mentioned above are perfect prospects for switching to the Republican Party, based on their family values, self-respect and honor. The genial Irishman from Boston, Tip O'Neill, was right when he said, "All politics is local."

Twenty years ago the face of the military looked somewhat like the face of America, without a disproportionately large cohort of white, Anglo-Saxon Christian young people from the Old South. In fiscal 2002, the South, double in population compared to New England and the Middle Atlantic States, provided 75,000 new recruits vs. 25,000 from the Northeast. Not just double the recruits, but triple.

Can the nation's military thrive under Southern hegemony? The final outcome may be difficult to measure in advance, but one thing is certain: It would be more likely to keep the nation in support if geographical equity is observed.

Hampton watching growth near Langley
Officials want to make sure development doesn't threaten the Air Force base as it did Oceana.
Daily Press (Hampton Roads, VA)
Terry Scanlon
September 4 2005

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HAMPTON -- Heightened concern about development around military airfields has Hampton officials studying ways to ensure that Langley Air Force Base is not engulfed by homes and businesses the way Oceana Naval Air Station has been in Virginia Beach.

The federal base-closing commission has threatened to close Oceana unless Virginia Beach and the state buy thousands of homes around it that are worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Then, a member of the commission raised concerns about development intruding on the flight paths of several Air Force bases, including Langley.

Langley is the second-largest employer on the Peninsula, with about 11,000 jobs. It appears certain to survive the current round of base closings, but Councilman Charles Sapp wants to study the city's policies that control growth near it.

At least twice in the past decade, Hampton and state officials have approved changes that Air Force officials said could threaten the base's future.

Sapp said he wants the city to study the history of development around the base and ensure that nothing happens that would interfere with the mission at Langley because it plays a critical role in the city's economy and culture.

"The more you disregard them, the more we put Langley at risk," Sapp said. "Obviously, the Air Force can't run our land-use program. We're going to have conflict in interests, but we need to work together."

Government and Air Force officials agree that the flight paths in and out of Langley are much less obscured than the ones at Oceana.

"There's a big difference between us and Oceana," said Laura Baie, the community planner at Langley Air Force Base. "We have a pretty good relationship with the city of Hampton."

The Air Force's biggest concern is Thomas Nelson Community College, which was built in 1968, a decade before the Air Force developed a potential crash zone that covers the campus.

Since the Air Force highlighted the college as a leading concern, the school expanded the campus by adding another academic building, Templin Hall.

Robert Elsass, the vice president for institutional advancement at Thomas Nelson, said the college has worked closely with the Air Force.

A uniformed Air Force officer was at the college's groundbreaking. When school officials designed Templin Hall, they ditched plans for a child care center and clock tower after hearing the Air Force's concerns.

"It would've been pretty," said Elsass, who is a retired Air Force officer, "but it was nonessential, and we removed it from the plans. We did not build it."

Earlier this year, the city changed its zoning guidelines in a business park near the base. Terry O'Neill, Hampton's planning director, said the changes allow a new medical center for Riverside Hospital. All of the Air Force's concerns were about areas outside of the crash zone but within the broader noise zone, he said.

O'Neill said the city has been working for two decades to control growth around the base, including creating a special provision that prohibits homes in the crash zone.

Even before Sapp's call for studying development around the base, known in military circles as encroachment, city officials had already begun making changes.

The city plans to join Virginia Beach in a land-use study to determine ways to handle development near the base. Also, the city has formalized its method of communicating with

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the Air Force about development around the base.

Last month, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission opted to save Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico, at least until 2009, even though the base doesn't have a critical mission. The reason was that the base, outside an urban area, had unrestricted airspace and no encroaching development.

Commissioner Lloyd W. "Fig" Newton, a retired Air Force general, said it was foolish to discard a valuable base such as Cannon when several other Air Force bases face encroachment problems.

"Many of the primary Air Force bases today are encroached," Newton said, singling out Langley, Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada and Luke Air Force Base in Arizona.

While the problem is not yet critical, he said, "as we look out in the future, I expect this problem will get worse."

Three primary things differentiate Langley from Oceana.

First, the runways at Langley look out over the Back River, which means development is a concern only on the west side of the base.

In Virginia Beach, homes surround Oceana.

Second, there are far fewer homes and businesses within the potential crash zones outside Langley than there are near Oceana.

Third, the training with fighter jets at Langley is different from what goes on at Oceana. At the Virginia Beach base, the jets practice aircraft-carrier landings, which require the pilots to accelerate when they hit the runway in case they miss the tail hook and need to get airborne quickly.

At Langley, the takeoffs and landings are more conventional, except that the fighter jets climb toward the clouds more quickly. The new jets, the F/A 22 Raptors, are expected to take off at even steeper angles, meaning the area of loud noise around the base will be smaller, according to an Air Force report.

Langley officials said it's critical that the city and state limit what gets built in certain areas near the base.

The Air Force doesn't want large gatherings of people in the potential crash zones - whether in homes, restaurants or schools - for safety reasons. It limits those same developments in the broader noise zones around the base because it wants to avoid clashing with residents about the deafening noise from jet engines.

Bullet dodged

The Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star
(Fredericksburg,, VA)
September 4, 2005 1:06 am

With the Base Realignment and Closing Commission's recommendations now in the rear-view mirror, there's been a collective sigh of relief in the Rappahannock region. Not only was Dahlgren spared, but Quantico is slated to see some 3,000 additional jobs.

The BRAC process was created to help base-closing decisions emanate from an objective process, rather than the pork-barrel maneuverings of Congress. This round of base closings started at the end of December 2003. The commission began its work in the spring, studying the economic and tactical feasibility of shifting defense resources around. Now, its report goes to the Pentagon. If approved, it will go to the White House and then Congress, for a simple, thumbs-up or -down, no-tinkering vote.

Assuming approval of the BRAC recommendations (which is not a guarantee), the Rappahannock region will be in good stead. For that, we can thank our Capitol Hill representatives and some local groups, including the Fredericksburg Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Two years ago, foreseeing the impact base closings could have on the economy in this area,

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the Chamber began to look for a strategy to fight changes. Chamber President Linda Worrell recognized there was some homework to do. "We didn't have an organized infrastructure to support the bases. We didn't know the value of the bases," she says. After a consultant completed an economic analysis, that value was found to be substantial: one-third of the local work force and $1.2 billion are directly attributable to defense spending.

Next step: to tell the stories of the bases to legislators, defense officials, and the community at large. With the aid of 100 volunteers and the support of all five local governments plus other organizations, the picture was painted, the message received, and lo and behold, the BRAC decisions made were favorable to our area.

The regional cooperation in the BRAC effort was outstanding, reports Ms. Worrell, as was the assistance received from Gov. Warner, Sens. Warner and Allen, and Rep. Jo Ann Davis.

All in all, it was a good show; one which will pay off in economic stability for our area for years to come. For that, we can be grateful.

Opinions/ Editorials

Rumsfeld Didn't Target Groton

Hartford Courant (Hartford, CT)
September 4 2005

U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, a Republican from Stonington, spoke this past week with The Courant's editorial board. Here are edited excerpts from the talk.

On May 13, Friday the 13th, something fairly serious happened to the state of Connecticut and to me as a member of Congress and to our delegation. The Department of Defense placed our beloved Naval Submarine Base New London, located in Groton - we try to confuse our enemies [laughter] - on the list not just for realignment but complete closure. This was a huge shock and had huge impact on the regional economy, on the state of Connecticut and, I would argue, on the nation. ...

The idea of pulling this center of excellence out of Connecticut and scattering its parts throughout the country was just an absurd notion. The only parallel I could think of was going to New Haven and looking at Yale University and saying, "We're going to take the college and put it in Chicago. And we're going to take the law school and school of management and put them down in Florida. And we're going to take Yale-New Haven Hospital and stick it out in California. And it's going to be a better university that way."

That is what was being done here. You have synergy between the base, the school, the medical facilities, the training activities, the maintenance and repair. Then you have synergy outside with Bob Ballard, for example, who missions NR1. Most people don't know that, but he's been missioning NR1 for many years.

What does "missioning" mean?

That means that he goes to the Navy with a project that needs to use the NR-1.

And what's the NR-1?

The Naval Research One. It's the smallest nuclear submarine in the world. It was designed and developed by EB [Electric Boat]. It's stationed here. It is a nuclear-powered deep diver that has been responsible for some extraordinary missions over the last 30 years. Bob Ballard, in fact, was returning from a Navy mission using the NR-1 when he obtained his first indications of the location of the Titanic.

Is that the Jason?

No. The NR-1 is a Navy vessel, commissioned by Adm. [Hyman G.] Rickover, designed and built by EB over 30 years ago. The Jason is his civilian-side underwater submersible.

The NR-1 is a unique national asset and it's always been missioned out of Groton/New London. To take it down to Georgia just didn't make any sense because so many of the activities that went into creating the missions for

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it were based on people, assets and resources that were located right here. ...

I have to tell you, things could have gone very differently except for the political courage of some of our elected officials. I sat at the table with Sen. [Joe] Lieberman and Gov. [M. Jodi] Rell the day of the announcement. It was not what we expected. We expected realignment. We had a series of mission papers we worked up in advance: What if they realign this? Here's what we say. What if they realign that? Here's what we say. So we were prepared to fight a realignment. Total closure hit us like a bomb. Everyone at the table was stunned.

It would have been very easy for the governor to decide politically that this was a federal issue and she would leave it to the federal delegation. And it would have been very easy for Sen. Lieberman and Sen. Dodd to say, "Well, this is the Bush administration, it's [Secretary Donald] Rumsfeld's DOD [Department of Defense], and Rob as a Republican is perfectly prepared to deal with his party." None of that happened. The governor immediately decided we were going to fight and she would lead the fight. She would apply state resources to help us in the battle.

Sen. Lieberman immediately decided that - as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and somebody who had been involved with military issues for more than a decade - he was going to join the battle.

So when we went out to meet the press half an hour later, we had already created a cadre of people who were going to fight this, and that cadre became the core of what we called Team Connecticut. ...

We brought in [state Attorney General] Dick Blumenthal, who did a magnificent job of researching the deeds to the base and then, at my request, providing a three-page analysis of the federal facility agreement, which he negotiated in 1994. It said that the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], the Navy and the state of Connecticut had in place a legal document that required complete cleanup before they could vacate the property. That created an extra $100 million of cost that the DOD had not counted on.

We worked with some folks inside the base to identify documents that proved beyond a reasonable doubt that moving the school to Georgia was going to cost substantially more than anticipated. We questioned the military-value analysis, where they miscounted the number of dry docks, for example. We showed that closing the hospital and moving medical billets would not save money ...

How could Rumsfeld have gotten this so wrong and miscalculated? Does this raise questions in your mind about his fitness?

Whenever you have a manager of a large organization and there are problems within the organization, the manager, the chief executive officer, must assume responsibility for that. But that does not necessarily mean that person is involved intimately with the details.

Sen. [John] Warner [R-Va.] has accused Rumsfeld of steering certain decisions in certain ways, specifically with regard to civilian employees of the Department of Defense in northern Virginia. I really don't know whether that's true or not, but I know that they have released documents that they feel prove that's the case.

I have no reason to believe that Rumsfeld was intimately involved with the decision to close Sub Base New London. My assessment is that politics were involved, but it was Navy politics; it was surface/subsurface [submarine] politics.

Not red state, blue state?

Not red state, blue state, although that is sort of the obvious answer.

For years - and the surface Navy will tell you this in the quiet of happy hour - the submariners, with Rickover leading the charge, had gotten everything they wanted. NR1 cost $100 million. That's pretty expensive for a tiny little sub. For years, the surface Navy, specifically the aircraft

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carrier folks, have felt they've gotten the short end of the stick.

During the discussion process, the submariners rejected the proposal to close Sub Base New London. When the decision process went above their level, it was decided to close Sub Base New London, but no submariners were part of that decision. Once the decision was made, the chain of command said, "You'll now support the decision." ...

So that made it very difficult for us to fight the battle, because we knew the submariners didn't agree with this, but we also knew that they had no choice but to stand up for a decision that had been made by higher headquarters.

You ask how Rumsfeld got it wrong. Rumsfeld, I think, essentially let the Department of Defense BRAC team bring the proposals to him. He may have given them some guidance, but I have no reason to believe he targeted this base.

But I approached him a week before the announcement and he essentially told me he was going to endorse the DOD BRAC recommendations, that he wasn't going to change them; that whatever they said, that was what he was going to go with.

So my feeling was that he was not involved in this.

But I am very distressed that a data call on grading dry docks, which we answered with a No. 3, was changed down in Norfolk to 2 because one of them was being repaired. ...

The secretary of the Navy promised me that synergy would be part of the data call. ... Synergy was not part of the data call. They misled us. They said it would be, and it wasn't.

...Wasn't this just part of the process? That you guys got to go and say, "You counted the number of piers there and I think you're wrong, sir"? The outcome is the way you wanted it to be.

...I had repeated problems trying to get information out of the Navy. They simply wouldn't release it, right up to the Friday before the vote.

The DOD had two years and a billion dollars to run these scenarios. We basically had three months and whatever money the state can come up with to fight the scenario.

Fortunately for us, our base realignment coalition had been meeting since 2003 at my request. ... So when May 13 came along, we already had a team of people who had done this before and we could move immediately into fighting it.

You're correct, it's a huge task, but the BRAC commissioners themselves said that there wasn't enough time for them to make really serious judgments on some of the issues they had to judge. That may have worked to our advantage.

I'm not a military strategist. What is the place of subsurface warfare going forward?

... We think of submarines usually in terms of World War II or movies like "Das Boat" - a bunch of guys in their undershirts with lights flickering and water up to their waist and all sorts of scary stuff. That's history, that's tradition, but that's not where we are today.

These are the most sophisticated machines for warfare or for intelligence collection or for surveillance or for reconnaissance ever devised by anybody.

Yes, they fired the first shots in the war in the Gulf in 1991. They have tremendous capability when it comes to warfare. And yes, the strategic subs are a reminder to the Chinese, the former Soviet Union and others that we have ICBMs underwater in locations you will never know that will respond if you initiate something against us.

So the strategic balance is maintained by the submarines, not by B52s or land missiles.

Everybody ought to recognize the value of submarines as you describe it, and I guess some

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people are saying, "Yeah, that's true, but we don't need any more."

The Cold War is over.

We have enough cruise missile platforms, we have enough [submarines] to go snuggle up the coasts.

The problem is that we don't.

Vern Clark, chief of naval operations, commissioned the force structure assessment of 2004, which essentially said that 37 to 41 subs is OK for the out years. That assessment was the lowest assessment of any of the 13 done over the last decade. It departed dramatically from the testimony we got from [Vice] Adm. [Charles L.] Mullen this summer, which said 54 is about right.

Fifty-four allows us to meet 70 percent of the combatant commanders' missions. Thirty-seven to 41 allows about a third of their missions. These are the combatant commander-certified missions that they need throughout the world. If you can meet 70 percent of the missions, there's a risk factor, but it's what you call acceptable risk. But if you can only meet 30 percent, that's unacceptable risk.

Submarine production is going down because we're retiring the Los Angeles class and we're only doing one Virginia class a year. We've been pushing for two a year for three years.

I believe that in the out years, we can get two Virginia class submarines a year because the first Virginia has now entered the fleet under budget and a year early because of the amazing synergy between the base and Electric Boat, which you don't have at Newport News.

I thought the work was split between EB and Newport News?

It is. The second Virginia class, the USS Texas, is way over budget and behind schedule. Way over budget.

The Navy may eventually start consolidating submarine production right here because we can do it cheaper and better, and the reason we do it cheaper and better is the lead designer is EB. We always build the first boat and we've done that since World War II, but with current submarine production, we build modules at Quonset Point that we bring down on barges. We will have a command and control room module, we'll have torpedo room module. These are very high-tech modules. ... Then we put the crew in while the module is still in the big factory building.

In the old days, you would build a sub, stuff it with electronics and bring the crew on board and start testing it out. Oops, this was supposed to be hot water; it's cold. In the new design/build system, the crew is in there upward of a year before the sub hits the water. So every flaw, every bug within that module is worked out. And the crew is trained on the module so when you put the pieces together and weld them together and join up the cables, the crew has already been in the sub. This has accelerated the process of building. It's accelerated the process of training the crew.

But you can only do it if the crew's families are up the road. You can't do it if you have to fly the crews in and put them in a motel somewhere, which is what would happen if they close the base.

It's a very efficient, high-tech way of designing subs so the Virginia class has gone out under budget, ahead of schedule, with incredible performance.

Meanwhile, the USS Texas down in Virginia ... They're having big problems.

Additional Notes

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