

BASE VISIT REPORT

NIAGARA FALLS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AIR RESERVE STATION

27 JUNE 2005

LEAD COMMISSIONER:

Anthony J. Principi, Chairman

ACCOMPANYING COMMISSIONERS:

General Lloyd W. (Fig) Newton (USAF Ret)
Brigadier General Sue Turner (USAF Ret)
Honorable James Bilbray

COMMISSION STAFF:

Michael H. Flinn, Ph.D., Mr. David Van Saun, Mr. Dan Cowhig, Ms. Ashley Buzzell

LIST OF ATTENDEES:

Chairman Principi	Commissioner Newton	Commissioner Turner	Commissioner Bilbray
Mike Flinn	Dave Van Saun	Dan Cowhig	Ashley Buzzell
Col. James Roberts	Col. Oreste Varela	Col. Mike Mounts	Lt. Col. Patrick Roemer
Lt. Col. James Atkinson	Col. James Kwiatkowski	Col. Rosemary Kuca	Brigadier General Robert Knauff
Maj. Gen. Tom Maguire	Maj. Patrick E. Campbell	Lt. Col. Dough K. Hartley	Lt. Col. Douglas C. Eoute
Col. Timothy G. Vaughan	Lt. Col Mark Murphy	Lt. Col. Terry Lawrence	Col. Thomas J. Keough
SMSgt Cheryl Went	Jason J. Ashton	Charlie Perham	Andrew Shapiro
Merrill Lane	Don Fix	Ryan McCoughly	Sen. Charles Schumer
Col. Patricia Jarmuz	Rep. Louise Slaughter	Rep. Tom Reynolds	Lt. Peter Nowak

BASE'S PRESENT MISSION:

Niagara Falls International Airport Air Reserve Station (NFARS) is the home of the Air Force Reserve (AFRes) 914th Airlift Wing (AW), and the New York Air National Guard (NYANG) 107th Air Refueling Wing (ARW). The 914th AW provides reserve airlift operations both within the United States and throughout the world. The 107th ARW provides in-flight refueling capability for such missions as Operation Noble Eagle and the North East Tanker Task Force.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE RECOMMENDATION:

Close NFARS by:

- Distributing eight C-130H aircraft of the 914th AW (AFRes) from NFARS to the 314th AW at Little Rock Air Force Base (AFB), AR
- Distributing eight KC-135R aircraft of the 107th ARW (NYANG) to Bangor International Airport Guard Station, ME

- Moving the 914th Headquarters to Langley AFB, VA
- Realigning the Expeditionary Combat Support to the 310th Space Group Air Force Reserves at Shriever AFB, CO
- Moving the Civil Engineering Squadron to Lackland AFB, TX

MAIN FACILITIES REVIEWED:

The Commissioners and staff participated in a windshield tour of the facility. This tour consisted primarily of visits to the flight ramp and apron, and a ride around the runway and taxiways. As part of the tour; airplane hangers, fuel storage facilities, deicing pads, housing, and the location of the future Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) were observed.

KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED:

Installation and community representatives identified the following issues as key to accepting or rejecting the Department of Defense's recommendation:

- The military value of NFARS was underestimated
- The economic value of NFARS was underestimated
- The savings to taxpayers was overestimated
- The future potential of the base was underestimated

INSTALLATION CONCERNS RAISED:

The concerns raised by the commanders of the 914th and the 107th are grouped into four general categories. These categories pertained to specific information relevant to NFARS' military value and the use of outdated data, joint use capabilities, general observations on the effect of BRAC recommendations on the Air Force Reserve and National Guard, and concern regarding the implications of the BRAC recommendations for National Defense. The following paragraphs reflect the information provided by NFARS personnel.

The NFARS staff maintain that Niagara Falls is a "unique place to operate and train". With a 9829 foot runway, they are able to handle "any aircraft in the Air Force inventory". KC-135s can depart with a maximum fuel load as a result of recent improvements. However, the recent runway extension was not captured in the Air Force BRAC data call. Similarly, the second runway was not considered an assault runway for BRAC purposes, even though it is used for that purpose by pilots of the 914th. In addition to their numerous runways, NFARS has "15,000 square miles of unencumbered airspace with military low-level routes right after takeoff."

Since 1995, NFARS has made a concerted effort to improve its infrastructure. As a result, 100% of excess capacity (33% of total) was eliminated over the past 10 years. New construction has modernized or provided a:

- Consolidated Training Facility
- Composite Maintenance Facility
- Runway extension/overrun

- Fuel Cell Hangar
- Visiting Officer Quarters
- Billeting for 254 individuals (not 161 as incorrectly reported in the BRAC data)
- Messing
- Fitness Center
- Aircraft Parking Areas
- POL storage capacity complete with modern Type 3 underground hydrant fuel delivery system

Consequently, the average age of NFARS' buildings is 32 years, or approximately 10 years less than that of other Air Force Reserve Command facilities. A recent agreement with the State of New York reduced electricity rates from \$0.11 per kilowatt hour to approximately \$0.06 per kilowatt hour giving NFARS an annual reduction in electric utility costs of approximately 45% or \$450,000 annually. Since these reductions occurred after the 2003 data call deadline, they were not captured in the Air Force analysis of an installation's military value. Finally, NFARS currently supports 8 C-130s and 8 KC-135s. However, it could increase the number of planes to 17 C-130s and 13 KC-135s with no additional MILCON.

NFARS has demonstrated joint use capabilities and supports sixteen Federal, State, and Local organizations, including the Department of Homeland Security with aviation patrols of the Niagara Power Project and international crossing locations. Col. James Roberts, (914th AW Commander) stated that 16.2 million people and over 1,183,000 trucks enter the United States from the Niagara Falls and Buffalo bridges, representing 61% of all United States-Canadian international commercial traffic. NFARS is also a Federal Disaster Area Headquarters and Staging Facility. Recent contingency operations that were supported from NFARS include:

- Two Federal disaster incidences for snow removal
- Support to New York City at the World Trade Center site
- Y2K
- 28 May 05 Rainbow Bridge HAZMAT incident

NFARS has built strong relationships with such national defense contractors as Lockheed Martin, Sierra Research, Calspan, General Dynamics, and Northrup Grumman. The 914th AW is currently used as a test bed for Northrup Grumman's Joint Threat Emitter while the 107th is both the host and a participant in Calspan/General Dynamics Automated Air Refueling test program for the Unmanned Combat Air Vehicle. Finally, NFARS serves as a deicing test site for the Air Force Research Laboratory's Environmental Security Technology Certification Program.

According to information provided during the base visit, there are 2,602 experienced/trained total force Reserve and Guard personnel serving in the 914th and the 107th. Members of these two units have an average experience level of 14 years and have participated in numerous recent conflicts. Both wings have been able to exceed retention rates of over 95% and recruitment rates of over 100%. Of the members of the 107th, 90% live within in a 50 mile radius of the unit while 75% of the 914th staff live within that same radius. Consequently, the unit members are "tied to the community [through] both family and employers and are not easily relocated." Col. Roberts maintained that the personnel of the 914th AW and 107th ARW consist of a highly skilled,

combat-ready force providing a “national asset that would be lost, not relocated, with base closure.” Additionally, the Air Force Reserve provides 20% of the total Air Force for 4% of the total budget. Combining with the Guard creates a 50% “plus-up” at only 10% of the total cost.

NFARS representatives expressed concern over the effects of the BRAC recommendations on the nation’s tactical lift and tanker viability and reach capability. The location of NFARS offers “unique qualities for the tanker and tactical airlift missions that other areas cannot provide.” It is the furthest western air base on the continental United States from which a C-130 can fly un-refueled to the European Theatre (sic).” It is an important transient stop for aircraft deploying to Europe and returning from overseas deployment to refuel and clear customs. A KC-135 can fly nonstop from NFARS to either the Middle East or the Pacific Rim. If approved, the BRAC recommendations will reduce the number of C-130s available in the northeast from 60 to 11, all of which will be located at a single installation in Rhode Island. The BRAC recommendations also will reduce the number of tankers located in the northeast from 57 to 40. This loss of 17 KC-135 represents 29% of the support for the Northeast Tanker Task Force.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS RAISED:

NFARS is located in an economically depressed region and is the second largest employer in the area. Community representatives maintain that the Cost of Base Realignment Actions (COBRA) model underestimated the economic impact to the locality by including Niagara Falls in the Buffalo, New York Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) population estimates. The Department of Defense estimated a job loss of 1,072. However, members of the Niagara Military Affairs Council (NIMAC) contend that closing NFARS will result in the loss of 2,906 jobs, eliminating 3.5% of Niagara County’s job base and potentially increasing the area’s unemployment rate from 6.1% to 7%. They maintain that this will create an “economic tipping point” that will cause irreversible damage. Community representatives indicated that conditions for successful redevelopment of NFARS do not exist. The population for Niagara County has dropped from 220,755 in 1990 to 2000. Since 2001; manufacturing employment is down 19.4%, information technology employment is down 27.6%, employment in the financial services sector is down 5.6%, and employment in the transportation and utilities industries is down by 3.9%.

Community representatives also highlighted the proximity of NFARS to the Canadian border and suggested that consolidating C-130s at Little Rock AFB will reduce tactical airlift in the northeast by 54% while creating no operational or cost benefits. In addition to the 914th AW and the 107th ARW, NFARS also supports elements of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Army Reserves and National Guard, Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Agency, and Customs and Border Protection. Local agencies include Red Cross, Fire Department, County Sheriff, and the Niagara Falls Police. Community representatives maintain that given their proximity to the border and the level of vehicle traffic there, many of these agencies play a significant role in homeland security. Consequently, a chief concern of the community is how these agencies will be supported in the event NFARS is closed.

Community representatives stated that the Air Force closure guidelines were inconsistently implemented in that installations having lower mission compatibility index (MCI) values than NFARS were not recommended for closure. Specifically:

- NFARS C-130 MCI score was higher than Quonset, Cheyenne, and Peoria yet those facilities would gain aircraft under the proposed recommendations.
- The NFARS C-130 MCI was equivalent to that of Youngstown-Warren Airport Air Reserve Station which would remain open under the proposed recommendations.
- Although its MCI value for KC-135s was lower than that of NFARS, Bangor was recommended to receive eight replacement KC-135s from NFARS and four from another source.

Finally, representatives of the community felt that the Air Force recommendations were made based on outdated or incomplete information. The “Widget” model, used to develop the MCI scores, did not allow the use of 388,503 square feet of Federally owned ramp space available for use by NFARS. Further, the use of data for fiscal year 2003 did not capture significant reductions for base operating support that occurred in fiscal years 2004 – 2005.

REQUESTS FOR STAFF AS A RESULT OF VISIT:

None