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Members of the BRAC Commission,

Greetings. I am writing to you in regards to the DoD's 2005 recommendation list for base closures and realignments. After reviewing the list I would like to point out a few things that I think are not being considered in the Pentagon's recommendations. We here at the 117th ARW Birmingham, Alabama are highly dedicated in performing our mission to the utmost of our ability. Knowing this, I was EXTREMELY surprised in seeing that our unit was recommended for realignment. When it comes to mission effectiveness I feel that we outperform most, if not all, of the other Air National Guard tanker units in the nation and quite possibly *any* active duty tanker unit. We receive nothing but praise for our outstanding work while deployed overseas. We are seasoned professionals; we are highly meticulous when it comes to aircraft operations; and we have shown over the years that we are both eager and highly motivated to take our mission to whatever theater we are called.

Though I was discouraged after reading the DoD's recommendations I *am* thankful (and hopeful) that there will now be a team from the BRAC Commission visiting our base. It is my hope that they will observe our effectiveness and discover that we are the right unit to lead the Air Force/ANG for many years to come.

In truth, it makes more sense for us to *gain* a few more aircraft. We already have in place the ramp and hanger space that would be necessary to accommodate 4 more tankers, bringing our total to 12 aircraft. Plus, the Birmingham International Airport is currently involved in a project that lengthens one of its runways from 10,000 feet to 12,000 feet. Though this is a city-funded project, any type of aircraft (including tankers) will benefit from this longer runway. Scheduled to be completed in Dec. '06, this runway will give a Birmingham based KC-135 the takeoff distance needed to leave the ground with more fuel onboard, allowing it to perform a 4 hour mission (as is the "expected" flying time for the ALERT tankers) that completely covers the operating range of 2 neighboring ANG tanker units with their shorter runways. This is something that very few units can offer. We have always been a very capable unit and now we're about to get even better.

Real briefly, the 117th offers numerous advantages to the Air Force that most other tanker units cannot: VERY modernized facilities; fully trained personnel on the "R" model KC-135's; the ability to perform the mission better than anyone else; and the willingness *and* reputation to accept the call to duty. It cannot be denied that our unit has been one of the most active tanker units before and since 9/11; always volunteering to go the extra mile to ensure that the Air Force's mission objectives were met, what ever country that may have been in.

In short, it appears that the DoD did indeed deviate substantially from the criteria used to determine military value of our base when they composed their 2005 recommendations.

I hope that you can see that the 117th ARW is much more than an average tanker unit. We have been leaders for many years and are eager to continue to lead the way. It would benefit the Air Force to *strengthen* operations here at Birmingham, not end them. As I said earlier, we are already a highly proficient unit and we are once again ready to accept more responsibility. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
SSgt Gary Hipps
Aircraft Electrician
117 ARW Birmingham, AL