

The future of our base update ...

Here is an update on what has been going on with regards to the flying mission. As I stated in the video for March Commanders' Call, the Pennsylvania Guard delegation did its annual visit to "the Hill" on March 3rd. Once again, out of all the issues in the Army and Air National Guard, Willow Grove was the number one area of concern (this is the 2nd time in the past 4 years). This meant that various levels of military officials discussed Willow Grove, our A-10 situation, and the future of the Joint Interagency Installation with every senator and congressman in Pennsylvania (Scott Roy, an assistant of Governor Rendell, was also a part of our visit and led numerous discussions).

As a result, a letter on the following page was drafted. This is significant as it was signed by every single senator and congressman ... that is no easy task, and I think happened only once prior as far as I can remember (again for us here at Willow Grove). So where to we go from here? As I have said before, we here have done everything in our power to help this situation ... we have done our job and we have done it very well. It is politics, and we are dependant on our politicians to engage Secretary Gates and the Department of Defense on down to the Guard Bureau, etc. General Wright, General Sischo, the Governor's office (and most definitely Governor Rendell) are also working hard on this matter. As the letter states, they are asking for a "hold" so that a future course can be plotted out for our unit. Obviously the objective is to keep a flying mission.

Of course another long standing point has been that the original BRAC law stated that we would keep all of our manpower, and clearly that is not the case as we have experienced. The point of end strength is also mentioned in this letter and many, to include Al Kinney and the Association of Civilian Technicians (ACT) have been making that point as well. Mr. Kinney and other ACT representatives just came back from their annual visit to Washington, D.C., and they too went around and spoke to every single senator and congressman.

But again ... we are at the mercy of our political representatives and Guard leadership to work a resolution. This is no easy task and certainly has no guarantees. Frustrating yes, but we have to keep everything in perspective. We have come a long way from "The 111th will be deactivated" and "The base is closing." Change has and will occur throughout the military and we will adapt to whatever our final mission(s) become(s). I can tell you General Wright, General Sischo, many others and myself ... recognize what the 111th is, a fantastic organization that has gone over and above. I hear comments from many outside our unit about the quality of people we have and what we have done. We surpass many other units, guard and active-duty, and our record speaks for itself. Just please continue to operate in a smart and safe manner and please don't stretch, scrimp, scrape or compromise anything. We continue to evaluate our flying operation everyday and depend



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on everyone to know their limits and say "uncle" if it comes to that. Everyone has something at stake here, and everyone has the right to speak up and say something ... I need that and absolutely expect people to express their concerns. We are in a difficult position, and I just don't want to see anyone get hurt ... nothing we do is worth that pain.

Hopefully, some more information comes my way soon as to what discussions will be taking place. We continue to work issues for the Joint Interagency Installation (JII).

Many may have seen a recent article about a State bill that is being pushed by State Senator Greenleaf and State Representatives Murt and Taylor, and all actions by way of Horsham politicians to clarify mission usage for the JII. As always... questions are good, rumors are bad, ask your questions, thanks!

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Secretary Gates,

The Pennsylvania Delegation is writing to you on a matter of great urgency. We understand that the Air Force plans to begin redistribution of A-10 aircraft from the 111th Fighter Wing, Pennsylvania Air National Guard, as early as April 2009 and that 11 of the unit's assigned aircraft are scheduled to be moved in the next few months. The remaining 6 A-10s assigned to the 111th are to be moved next year.

We strongly believe taking the A-10s from the 111th Fighter Wing is premature and ill-advised. There is no requirement to move these aircraft at this time. Although the BRAC Commission's Report directed redistribution of the 111th's A-10s, it did not require that it be done on any particular timetable. What's more, the BRAC Commission directed that the Air Force should maintain the end strength of the 111th Fighter Wing, but the loss of the unit's flying mission will result in loss of up to 80 full-time jobs and 140 military positions. Finally, the pending action completely overlooks the BRAC Commission's finding that strongly encouraged the Air Force to keep the A-10s at the 111th Fighter Wing.

Taking the A-10s from the 111th Fighter Wing is a serious mistake. The original recommendation to redistribute the unit's mission aircraft was based largely on the assumption that the airfield at Willow Grove would not be in operation after the Navy leaves the installation in 2011. However, legislation passed by Congress in 2007 and 2008 provided for the establishment of a joint interagency installation under state jurisdiction and control at Willow Grove. This installation will continue to include an operational airfield to be used by the Pennsylvania National Guard, other military units, other government agencies and associated users to support national defense, homeland security and emergency preparedness missions.

It makes no sense to strip this unit of its aircraft and reduce its capabilities at a time when our Nation and our Commonwealth need them most. There are sufficient A-10 aircraft in the Air Force to keep all 17 mission aircraft at the 111th Fighter Wing. The 111th has the well-trained, combat-experienced aircrews and maintenance/support-personnel to continue to operate the A-10s in a cost-effective manner. The new joint interagency installation offers the airfield and support facilities for the 111th Fighter Wing to continue flying without major capital investments.

We are asking that you issue an order delaying the start of the movement of A-10s from the 111th Fighter Wing. This action will give the Air Force the opportunity to reassess the capabilities of the Horsham Joint Interagency Installation and to consider alternative future flying missions for this unit. This actions will preserve the capabilities of this unit and the Air Force to carry out close-air support and related missions that the men and women of the 111th Fighter Wing have performed with great distinction for many years.

Due to the urgent nature of this situation, the Pennsylvania Delegation respectfully requests that you respond to our concerns within the next two weeks. We thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to receiving your views. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of any assistance on this or any other matter.

Sincerely,

Senator Arlen Spencer
Senator Robert Casey
Rep. Allyson Schwartz
Rep. Patrick Murphy
Rep. John Murtha
Rep. Jim Gerlach
Rep. Robert Brady

Rep. Chaka Fattah
Rep. Bill Shuster
Rep. Paul Kanjorski
Rep. Charles Dent
Rep. Mike Doyle
Rep. Joe Pitts
Rep. Todd Platts

Rep. Glenn Thompson
Rep. Jason Altmire
Rep. Kathy Dahlkemper
Rep. Chris Carney
Rep. Joe Sestak
Rep. Tim Holden
Rep. Tim Murphy

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