Chapter 2

The Commission

The Commission was composed of 12 individuals from varied backgrounds (see Appendix C). All have had experience in dealing with complex public-policy issues. In many cases, they brought to the task a first-hand knowledge of military matters, and all have had extensive experience in organizational settings that has provided them with a perspective on how to improve processes. The Commission functioned in a non-partisan manner, and was supported by a professional staff (see Appendix D).

In organizing to accomplish its tasks, as defined in its charter and companion legislation, the Commission established a number of parameters to govern its work. Significant to its decisions was the selection of military value as preeminent among the criteria governing nomination of bases for closure or realignment. The Commission's recommendations will not degrade military effectiveness, and in most cases will improve it.

While military value was of primary importance in its deliberations, the Commission also considered cost savings. No cost-savings targets, floors or ceilings, were established, and the Commission felt no obligation to reach any particular dollar figure cited in studies that have appeared from time to time. The Commission determined that these previous savings estimates were for the most part derived from limited investigations, and represented only order-of-magnitude estimates.

The Commission also assumed for the purposes of its review that the force structure would retain the size and configuration outlined in currently approved plans. Unlike some previous reviews, the Commission's approach, consonant with its charter, focused on properties and their uses, not on military units, command structures, or other organizational matters. The Commission's ability to close major bases was often dependent upon the status of plans in the individual Services. For example, the Air Force, driven by severe current and projected fiscal constraints, had under way reduction and consolidation efforts that gave the Commission a number of opportunities. On the other hand, in the case of the Navy, whose base structure is tied quite closely to the current plan to create a 600-ship fleet, the Commission, adhering to the principle of not challenging Service force-structure planning, found fewer opportunities for closure actions.

Finally, the Commission's review of the Army's base structure revealed a larger number of installations needing closure due to that Service's ground-related mission and its role as executive agent for many DoD functions, but the operational savings from these closures are considerably less than those of the Air Force. Thus, the Commission found a variety of Service force-structure plans facing it, and its final recommendations and resulting savings reflect these differences. Each Service used vigorous presentations to explain its current posture and defend its individual views.

While the force structure may well change in the future, growing or shrinking in response to changing national strategy, budget considerations, political accommodations, or other factors, the Commission chose not to engage in a debate on these issues. Since there is no sure way of knowing what the strategy, force structure, and basing requirements will be in the long term, the Commission, in Chapter 8 of this report, expresses the need for a continuing base-review process.

In developing a methodology for arriving at decisions, the Commission established a process for reviewing the complete inventory of military properties, with an emphasis on larger installations.

Pursuant to the charter, and with Commission guidance, the staff developed a process for the initial evaluation of military installations. The purpose was to measure each installation against the criteria established in the charter so as to narrow the number of installations for more detailed and subjective review by the Commission. The Commission does not claim that the process outlined in Chapter 4 is the only possible alternative or that it is perfect; it is, however, an effective, methodical approach proceeding from reasonable assumptions, with military value as its cornerstone.

The Commission's screening and evaluative processes required vast amounts of information, much of which was available only from the Department of Defense. The Commission adopted an "auditing" approach that verified information through public hearings, formal and informal consultations, visits to bases, references to other sources, and the collection of supplemental data when necessary. The Commission is satisfied that its process made use of the best information currently available.

The process adopted was one in which judgment and expert opinion played an integral part. The Commission heard expert testimony, and the Commissioners drew upon their personal experience and investigations to identify candidate installations for review and to arrive at the conclusions in this report. The Commission and its staff visited 44 installations during the course of the review. The Commissioners engaged in vigorous debate on many issues, with a full and frank discussion of opinions. While there was disagreement on many issues, the Commissioners are unanimous in their support for the recommendations in this report.