

**PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS AND MANAGEMENT,
UNITED STATES SENATE**

SUBJECT: INSTALLATION READINESS

STATEMENT
OF
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This statement represents the views of the witness and does not represent those of the
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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, good morning, I am Lieutenant Colonel Brian Yolitz, Commander of the 20th Civil Engineer Squadron and Base Civil Engineer at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina. My squadron is made up of nearly 500 personnel—officers, NCOs, airmen, and civilians. We are responsible for all aspects of the maintenance, repair, alteration, and construction of Shaw's 400 plus buildings, 1704 family housing units, airfield and road-way pavements and the base's associated electrical, natural gas, water and sewer utility systems. We also provide crash rescue and fire protection services, explosive ordnance disposal, as well as environmental management for the 16 thousand acre complex which includes Poinsett Electronic Combat Range. I report to my wing commander on the condition of these systems and programs and how they are supporting his mission to fly and fight.

I certainly appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and share my views on the current state of facility conditions and how recent funding levels have affected me as a base civil engineer and my squadron's ability to support the mission needs of Shaw Air Force Base.

Background

In the 1970s, the Air Force realized quality facilities were important to the men and women of the Air Force. This was an acknowledgment by senior leaders that providing Air Force people with safe, efficient, and modern places to live and work positively impacted the quality of life and quality of service of our people and ultimately improved the overall morale and

readiness of our force. They recognized the very poor working and living conditions existing at that time had an overall negative impact on both.

In the mid-eighties and early nineties, our military construction and real property maintenance accounts were robust and we made great progress in providing quality facilities for our airmen and their families. Since then, investment in Air Force facilities has declined as a result of constrained defense budgets and competing Air Force requirements. We now see growth in the backlog of required work necessary to maintain the readiness edge we established in past years. Meanwhile, the expectations of our commanders, our people, and our families remain high, as they should. We are expected to balance mission readiness, modernization, and quality-of-life efforts in the face of aging infrastructure and declining military construction and real property maintenance budgets. I would like to provide you with my perspective on how this has affected me at work and at home.

Shaw Air Force Base

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Committee Members, Shaw Air Force Base is home to the 20th Fighter Wing and four squadrons of F-16 Fighting Falcons. We are on call to provide suppression of enemy air defense fighters and a host of combat support at a moments notice. We also host the headquarters US Central Command Air Forces and 9th Air Force.

On the 9th and 10th of August 1990, just after Iraq invaded Kuwait, two fighter squadrons from Shaw responded as part of the first wave of US aircraft to counter the Iraqi threat as part of Operation DESERT SHIELD. All told, more than 4000 people from the Fighter Wing and CENTAF—over two-

thirds of Shaw's military population—deployed as part of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. During Operation ALLIED FORCE, 36 F-16s and nearly 900 people deployed to Aviano Air Base, Italy, and Bandirma Air Base, Turkey, to fight the air war over Serbia. Over the past year, we have engaged in 20 deployments, moving more than 2,300 people and 620 tons of equipment and supplies to locations around the world.

As we speak, the 77th Fighter Squadron and more than 190 proud airmen are deployed in support of Operations NORTHERN and SOUTHERN WATCH. I have 18 airmen deployed as part of this group and back at Shaw, I have almost 50 airmen preparing to deploy in a force of over 850 others from Shaw as part of AEFs 5 and 6 in which we are the Lead Wing.

Air Expeditionary Force

I'd like to add, the AEF concept of packaging units of airpower capability has quickly become part of our culture. While we continue to find areas to improve the concept with each rotation, particularly in the area of expeditionary combat support, the AEF concept has delivered on the number one promise we made to our people and that is predictability. Each one of my airmen knows exactly when they are eligible to deploy—and they plan on that, arranging educational opportunities and family vacations based on what AEF they are assigned to.

Real Property Maintenance

Mr. Chairman, back at Shaw, we are all well aware of the impact current funding levels are having on our ability to maintain, repair, and, when

needed, replace, base facilities and infrastructure.

Since 1996, we have seen a steady decline in real property maintenance by contract, or RPMC funding. In FY96, we received nearly 14 million dollars for contract projects to maintain and repair base facilities and utility systems. In FY00, we received 7.6 million dollars, 2.4 million of which was a plus-up to support the beddown of our new flight simulator equipment. This year, we have received only 2.9 million dollars with little hope for any additional funding. This represents a reduction of nearly 80 percent—leaving many mission needs unaddressed.

One example is the repair of taxiway Foxtrot on our airfield complex, which has been shut down for several years due to the deteriorated condition of the pavement. While we have work-arounds in place for our day-to-day fighter operations, not having this taxiway severely limits our ability to handle large frame aircraft like the C-17, C-141 or KC-10 needed for deployment operations. Depending on the scenario, we are required to mobilize nearly 1,700 people and over 1400 short tons of equipment—more than 30 C-17 equivalents in a matter of days. Not having the proper taxiway system impedes our ability to mobilize our force quickly and efficiently.

Another example is our military working dog kennels. Our 6 military working dogs are indeed weapons systems. Trained for bomb and drug detection, they deploy throughout the United States in support of the Secret Service and counter drug operations along the Mexican border; and to meet force protection needs around the world. In fact, Iwan, a Belgian-Malamute bomb dog, is deployed and on duty with his handler in Southwest Asia, protecting

Americans serving in Kuwait. The facility, which houses these working dogs, was built by German Prisoners of War in 1943. It has failed the last 4 veterinary inspections and has deteriorated to the point that our dogs suffer multiple ear infections and skin irritations which have rendered them undeployable and unable to meet their mission needs on several occasions.

In general terms, our current real property maintenance funding levels allow us to only provide simple day-to-day maintenance and repair—to our most pressing needs. As a result, we are seeing a steady deterioration of our facilities and infrastructure. We have been forced to scale back preventative maintenance programs in several areas to the point where we respond only when a system fails and immediate action is required. This is evidenced by a continuous stream of emergency and urgent work requests for our in-house work force, particularly for roof and pavement repairs. Our inability to provide adequate preventative maintenance was also a contributing factor leading to our need to close taxiway Foxtrot.

We have reached a point where we no longer accept all the work requests from our customers. The work order allocation system we've created has our group commanders identify and prioritize their top ten work requirements. Our in-house craftsmen work directly off those lists. When they finish a job, our production controllers call the commander for his or her next most pressing need. There is always something to fill the vacant spot on the Top 10 lists. In fact, we are tracking over 800 orders for our main base and family housing maintenance work forces. In addition, our engineers have nearly 30 projects totaling over 20 million dollars worth of contract work on the shelf, awaiting funding. The estimated cost to raise our

Installation Readiness Report rating from C-4 to a C-2 is 139 million dollars. Chronically constrained funding over the last several years has lead to a “why bother, if it’s not an emergency, it will never get funded” mentality in some. As a result, I’m not certain this figure gives us a true assessment of our requirements to return our facilities and infrastructure to a condition where they fully support the missions of Shaw Air Force Base.

Military Construction Program

We rely on the Military Construction Program to do the “heavy-lifting” in terms of facility and infrastructure upgrades and replacement. We have seen a steady downward trend in terms of funding and opportunities in this area as well—particularly in the area of current mission requirements.

Since FY93, we have had only two current mission MILCON projects sent forward to the Congress as part of the President’s Budget for that year’s budget cycle—in FY94, we received a new Child Development Center (\$2.9M) and in FY97, we renovated 3 dormitories (\$8.5M).

Fortunately, we have been blessed with terrific support from the Congress who has championed projects and accelerated their execution for the betterment of our troops—at Shaw, that meant a Security Forces building in FY97, which helped move that unit out of a building built in the early 1950s and, until its recent demolition, was affectionately called “The Crack House.” And, this Committee brought a Dining Facility forward in the FY01 bill to replace our current facility built in 1958. That project is scheduled for a ground breaking late this summer and we are extremely grateful.

Like RPMC funding, reduced MILCON funding forces wing leadership into making tough choices and leaving critical mission needs unaddressed. For example, we need to replace the aircraft maintenance units for three of our fighter squadrons. Today, the aircraft maintenance crews working on our F-16s are crammed into facilities which are undersized, poorly laid out, and inefficient in terms of functional use and energy consumption. We also have plans to construct a new contingency deployment center—a smart and efficient way to enhance our readiness by consolidating and streamlining our ability to mobilize and deploy. Unfortunately, these requirements remain unfunded through FY07. The MILCON program also addresses quality-of-life needs for our installations. Our base library is housed in an undersized and deteriorated 47-year-old building. We need to replace it with a modern facility to support the ever-growing educational needs of our airmen and their families is also an unfunded requirement through FY07.

Family Housing

Funding for the day-to-day maintenance and repair of our family housing units has been relatively steady over the last several years. Unfortunately, the average housing unit at Shaw is 38 years--with 50 percent being built in the 1950s. And, while we have made some upgrades to these units with projects in the 1970s, the houses and neighborhoods are still designed and built for families of the 1950s and 60s. An Air Force family of today, as with any family in America, leads a vastly different life style. The computers, printers, and entertainment equipment that are the norm of the 21st century, have exceeded the electrical capacity of our units. The family of today has become more materialistic and, as a result, have more things in their household—they demand more room to store and display their belongings—

our units are undersized. Finally, our houses and neighborhoods were designed for just over one car per family. A two-car family is the norm today and as a result, our streets are crowded, causing cramped and unsafe conditions in terms of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Our housing units only have carports and our residents don't have the option of a garage which is the standard for a home in the civilian community.

Housing is an important issue for our people. It's a day-to-day quality of life issue, but it is also a retention issue. The Air Force recruits the member, but retains the family. When it comes time to make the decision to stay and reenlist, the member really only has 49 percent of the vote—the spouse and family has 51 percent—that's the way it is in my family. If we, as an Air Force, can not show the family that we are committed to them by providing a safe, quality place to live, they will elect to separate. We need to invest in upgrading or replacing our inadequate housing with homes and neighborhoods that reflect the needs and expectations of the modern, high-tech family. This is an important ingredient in retaining our bright, professional airmen.

Self-Help Program

Like most Air Force bases, we promote our Self-Help program. This program allows our customers to take on small scale projects that we are unable to accomplish due to funding or manpower shortfalls. Units supply the labor from within their organization and through our Self-Help store, receive materials, technical guidance, and support. Self-Help projects typically focus on enhancing quality-of-life type functions such as snack and break areas as well as office, supply, and training rooms. These projects

display the tremendous leadership and initiative of our airman and build unit esprit-de-corps by allowing teams to take responsibility for their work environment.

As the base civil engineer, I am frustrated that, because of manpower and funding levels, my squadron is not able to fully meet our customers' needs forcing them to turn to Self-Help to accomplish work we should be doing for them. Because Self-Help work is often done after duty hours and on weekends, I am also concerned that Self-Help, if unchecked, will add to the already heavy OPTEMPO and work load of our people—keeping them from their families and much needed time off. Make no mistake, the work accomplished through Self-Help is of good quality and the sense of pride when a unit completes a project is overwhelming—I just wish we could do more so our airmen could focus on the missions they're trained to do.

Vehicles

Just as providing quality places to work directly affects a members quality of service, so do the condition and quality of the tools we give them accomplish their mission. My vehicle fleet is another area limiting our ability to properly maintain and repair the base. I have a vehicle fleet of 146 vehicles. It is made up of a combination of 50 leased vehicles—general purpose vehicles like pick-up trucks—and an Air Force owned “Blue Fleet” of 96 vehicles and special purpose pieces of equipment like street sweepers, loaders, back hoes, and graders. The leased fleet is in good shape, typically replaced within 6 years or 40 thousand miles depending on condition, at an annual cost of 185 thousand dollars, which includes maintenance. However, my “Blue Fleet” is aged. Today, one-half of the

fleet (50 of 96) has reached or exceeded its life expectancy. Within three years, over 80 percent of the fleet (79 of 96) will have reached or exceed its life expectancy with little help on the horizon. Optimistically, I only see two replacement vehicles—a farm tractor, and dump truck—coming in between now and FY03.

As the age of our “Blue Fleet” increases, so does the cost of maintaining it. Our transportation squadron is funded on an average of 1,100 dollars per vehicle to maintain and repair my fleet. Unfortunately, this total is quickly depleted as major components fail—like transmissions, and street sweeper broom drive motors. When the bill to repair a vehicle exceeds his budget, he turns to me to fund the repairs and I am forced to dip into my facility maintenance and repair dollars to get the repairs made and get the vehicle back in the hands of my craftsmen.

Conclusion

The conditions I’ve highlighted, coupled together, make operating and maintaining an air base very challenging. I am blessed to command and work with the best and brightest people I’ve had the privileged to serve with in my 18 years in the Air Force. They deserve the very best and all the support we can give them. Mr. Chairman, in my opinion, we can no longer mortgage our infrastructure without significant, long-term negative effects—on our people and our readiness. Make no mistake, we have the very best people who will make the mission succeed, but they need our support today to meet the mission challenges of tomorrow.

There are base engineers at our 86 major Air Force installations across the US and around the world that could articulate their own experiences, analysis, and opinions of how reduced real property funding has affected them, their units, and the missions they support. The accounts I have highlighted today reflect my own experiences and opinions. I am very grateful for the opportunity to share them with you today.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the committee for its continued strong support of Air Force programs and benefits provided to me, my family, and more importantly, my fellow airmen, here at home and deployed around the world. I am eager to address any questions you may have at this time.