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Shipyard back on hit list



The Long Beach Naval Shipyard again faces the threat of closure.

Press-Telegram photo / Elizabeth Malby

Navy considering recommendation to shut it down

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WASHINGTON — The Navy is seriously considering a recommendation to shut down the Long Beach Naval Shipyard in the next round of base closings, according to documents obtained Wednesday by the Press-Telegram.

The closing of the yard, which employs 3,100 people, is included in each of three scenarios Navy officials are circulating to its facilities in advance of a new round of closures and base realignments to be considered during the first half of 1995.

The documents are the clearest and most ominous signals the Navy has yet given that it may jettison the sprawling Long Beach facility as the service

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continues to slim down to a 330-ship Navy.

"It appears that the Navy is working towards a scenario that would include closure of Long Beach," said Larry Taub, Washington lobbyist for the city on the shipyard. "If one of these scenarios ends up as a Navy recom-

mendation, the job of keeping the Long Beach Naval Shipyard open becomes even more critical and more difficult."

In fact, shipyard supporters have conceded, a formal Navy recommendation to close the shipyard would be almost impossible to reverse. That is because in the past two rounds of base closings, the independent Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission has used service recommendations as at least a starting point for eliminating military facilities.

"We know we were up against a heavy fight this year," said David Grayson, president of the Federal Managers Association, Chapter 10, at the shipyard. "I would hope they would look at something else. It just means

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we have to toughen up and make sure that when the Navy list comes out, we're not there. It's going to be an uphill fight and we know that."

Grayson and J.B. Larkins, president of the Long Beach Naval Shipyard Employees Association, arrived in Washington Wednesday night for two days of meetings with local lobbyists, congressional staffers, and White House and defense officials to discuss the yard's future. Theirs is one of a series of trips union officials and local leaders have made here regularly since the end of the 1993 base-closing round.

"It's a hit in the face," Larkins said of the Navy documents.

And it would be a major hit to the area's economy. The closure of the Long Beach Naval Station, ordered in 1991, cost the region \$1 billion when 16,000 sailors and 2,000 civilian jobs disappeared. A study commissioned by Long Beach, to be released today, estimates the shipyard contributes about \$757 million in annual spending to the regional economy and supports about 10,100 jobs in the area.

Similar scenarios

In 1993, the Navy did not recommend the Long Beach shipyard for closure, but the facility was added by the commission to a list of possible additional closings. In the end, the yard escaped death on a narrow 4-3 vote.

The two shipyards the Navy did recommend closing, Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, Calif., and Charleston Naval Shipyard in South Carolina, did end up on the commission's final hit list after the Navy ran scenarios similar to ones now being run on Long Beach. That list later was approved by President Bill Clinton and by Congress.

Long Beach shipyard backers and the Navy cautioned that the scenarios being studied still are part of a very early phase in a deliberative process that will last until next summer.

Once finalized, the Navy's recommendations will be incorporated in a package of proposed military base closings the Pentagon will send to the base closure commission by March 1. Theoretically, the Pentagon could veto any Navy recommendations before

forwarding them to the commission.

Once the base closings panel gets the Pentagon list, it will have until May 17 to add facilities for consideration for possible closure. The commission's final list must be sent to Clinton by July 1. If the president agrees to the recommendations, as it is expected he will, Congress then decides whether to approve or reject the list in its entirety.

The new scenarios that envision closing the Long Beach yard were prepared by the Navy's base structure analysis team, which is charged with developing a proposal for trimming excess facilities. The scenarios were sent to Navy base commanders around the country to ask them how their workloads, labor forces and facilities would be affected by possible shutdowns and realignments.

Each scenario begins with "Close NSYD Long Beach," which means the shipyard.

Under the first scenario, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, also would be closed, and excess docking capacity at other yards eliminated.

Under the second scenario,

Long Beach and the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Louisville, Ky., would close, the excess docking capacity at other yards eliminated, and electronic work at two other Navy facilities would be moved to remaining shipyards.

Under the third scenario, all of the actions in the previous two scenarios would be combined.

Non-nuclear yard

The scenarios do not explain why Long Beach is being targeted, but Navy officials and base closure commission staffers privately have told shipyard supporters that the facility's status as the only non-nuclear yard among the five remaining shipyards hurts its chances for survival.

The Navy has said that maintaining its capacity to repair and refuel nuclear ships is its top priority. Although Long Beach has carried out nuclear work in the past, it is not rated as a yard capable of doing any kind of nuclear work as the other four yards are.

Portsmouth apparently is being looked at for closure because it specializes in work only on submarines.

If Long Beach and Portsmouth

closed, the Navy would be left with Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard in Hawaii, Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Wash., and Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, Va.

The scenarios are being sent out "as part of the normal base closure and realignment process," said Lt. Cmdr. Bill Spann, a Navy spokesman in Washington. He could not say whether additional scenarios might be drawn up for the shipyards.

But, Spann said, "we've said all along that all bases not previously identified for closure will be looked at again in (the 1995 base closings round)."

"As you've heard in the news recently," he said, "readiness of our forward deployed naval forces is a key factor, if not the key factor, in a strong defense, and we can't maintain that readiness if we are spending money unwisely on excess infrastructure. We can't afford the infrastructure we have now."

Taub said it is possible that when the Navy examines the results from its scenarios, "they will realize they cannot operate effectively on the West Coast

without Long Beach."

Shipyard backers contend that the facility's huge dry dock, one of only two on the West Coast, combined with the yard's demonstrated efficiency, make Long Beach indispensable to the Navy's Pacific Fleet.

Criteria for closing

Here are the criteria the federal base closings panel is directed by law to use in deciding whether a base should be closed or spared:

■ Military value (these are the most important factors):

- Current and future mission requirements and the impact of operational readiness of the Pentagon's forces.
- The availability and condition of land, facilities and airspace at both existing and receiving facilities.
- The ability to accommodate contingency, mobilization and future force requirements at both the existing and receiving facilities.
- The cost and personnel implications.

■ Return on investment:

- The extent and timing of potential costs and savings, including the number of years it will take for savings to exceed costs.

■ Local economic and environmental impact:

- The economic impact on communities.
- The ability of both the existing and potential receiving communities to support the forces, missions and personnel.
- The environmental impact.

Source: The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission