



Gabreski Rescue Initiative Partnership

PO Box 646 • Westhampton • NY • 11977

*Newsday Editorial Page
Tuesday, August 17, 2004*

Save 106th rescue unit

Its vulnerable to base-closing efforts

The possibility that Long Island could lose the services of the 106th Rescue Wing ought to rattle not just those who work at its Westhampton Beach base, but all of Long Island. This unit's rescue mission is vital to the safety of our maritime community and to people all along the East Coast.

By next March 15, whoever is president will appoint a new Base Realignment and Closing Commission. By May 16, the secretary of defense must send the commission his recommendations for closings. The commission will hold public hearings and make a report to the president by Sept. 8. He can only accept or reject it - as is. If he accepts, it becomes binding on the Department of Defense, unless Congress rejects it.

The BRAC process, laid out by a 1990 law, is designed to calm the politics of streamlining the military. Previous rounds have cut the department's capacity by 20 percent, saving nearly \$17 billion by 2001. Of course, that doesn't stop local officials from trying to save bases. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), Rep. Tim Bishop (D-Southampton) and others have begun to make people aware of what the region stands to lose. That's wise timing, because once the report gets to the president, a little over a year from now, the possibility for altering its findings will have ended.

The wing is a key East End employer, but the commission will focus mostly on its usefulness. In such tragedies as the crash of TWA Flight 800 and the 9/11 attacks, and in the war in Iraq, the 106th has proven its value. But unless Long Island starts fighting-for it soon, its days may be numbered.