

State, County, Military Fear for Selfridge Base Jobs

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

Would it be less than cliché to declare that the future of the 107th Fighter Squadron at Selfridge Air National Guard Base is, well, up in the air?

The entire Pentagon is facing budget cuts and one of them has seemingly named the 107th Fighter Wing, which just returned from Afghanistan to SANG in Harrison Township. The 107th Fighter Squadron is part of the Air Guard's 127th Wing, all based at Selfridge.

Two developments of late on that. One is that U.S. Congresswoman Candice Miller has already met with Air Force officials about cutting the 107th, and two, the adjutant general of Michigan's Army and Air National Guard spoke at SANG recently to fill in the blanks for concerned airmen and flight crews whose jobs are at stake.

First, U.S. Rep. Miller issued the following statement about the situation at Selfridge:

"While I am pleased that the Air Force plans to add four KC-135 refueling aircraft to the 127th Wing of the Michigan Air National Guard, I remain very concerned about the impact that the loss of the 24 A-10 Ground Attack aircraft currently based at Selfridge ANGB will have on the base," she said.

"A net loss of 20 aircraft at the base will certainly mean a loss of jobs and will diminish the overall scope of the mission of the Michigan Air National Guard. After the 2005 Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC) round, the Air Force spent a great deal of money moving the A-10 mission to Selfridge ANGB and the members of 107th squadron have performed incredibly well in support of American ground forces on battlefields in both Iraq and most recently in Afghanistan.

"My concern also extends to if there is just one mission at Selfridge ANGB then that will make the base more vulnerable if the Pentagon is successful in achieving the expected two upcoming BRAC rounds in 2013 and 2015. I am interested in hearing more from the Air Force to justify these decisions.

"I look forward to working in a bipartisan way with the entire



USAF PHOTO: RACHEL BARTON

Crew chiefs with the 127th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Mich. (SANG), perform final checks for A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft of the 107th Fighter Squadron. The squadron has resumed a full, regular local flying schedule at Selfridge with the A-10s, also known as the Warthog, after recently returning from a 4-month deployment to Afghanistan.

Michigan delegation to support the men and women of Michigan's Air National Guard and continuing to advocate going forward to strengthen the mission at Selfridge ANGB so it can continue to be a critical component of our national defense."

That said, Maj. Gen. Gregory J. Vadnais spoke to air crews at Selfridge recently about these same concerns.

Vadnais, the adjutant general of Michigan's Army and Air National Guard, is seeking to maintain the current levels of personnel, aircraft and mission assignments in Michigan – possibly seeking to grow those numbers – even in the face of overall declines in the nation's military spending.

"Put simply, it makes the most economic sense for our nation to put more of its resources into the National Guard, rather than the active duty force," the general said during a Feb. 17 news conference at the base proper.

During the news conference, the general pointed out that the total cost of operating a squadron of 24 A-10 Thunderbolt II attack aircraft in an Air National Guard unit is about \$26 million per year. The same squadron in an active duty Air Force unit costs about \$52 million per year – almost exactly twice as much.

The Air Guard's 127th Wing flies A-10s at Selfridge, but that unit, the 107th Fighter

Squadron and its various supporting elements, is scheduled to be eliminated as part of an Air Force plan to reduce the number of A-10s in the overall inventory.

That plan, along with a plan to eliminate a squadron of cargo aircraft slated to locate at a base in Battle Creek, Mich., will eliminate about 630 jobs in the Michigan Air National Guard – about a quarter of the total positions in the organization.

"The loss of the A-10 squadron at Selfridge Air National Guard Base would be detrimental to the entire area," said Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel, one of several lo-

cal elected and community leaders who attended Vadnais' news conference in a show of support for local airmen.

"Hundreds of jobs would be eliminated as a result of the plan, causing economic hardship to local families."

As the general spoke at Selfridge, a pair of A-10s were preparing to fly on a training mission. The pilots, engine mechanics, weapons loaders, crew chiefs and related A-10 personnel from Selfridge recently returned home after a 4-month deployment in Afghanistan.

The 325 or so personnel who participated in that deploy-



USAF PHOTO: JOHN S. SWANSON

Major Gen. Gregory J. Vadnais, adjutant general of Michigan, makes a point during a recent news conference at Selfridge Air National Guard Base. Vadnais spoke about the value the National Guard provides to the nation and the key role the Guard plays in national defense.

ment have resumed a regular training schedule at the base, even in light of proposed cuts to their organization, to be ready to answer the next call.

Elsewhere on the base, airmen from the Michigan Air National Guard's KC-135 Stratotanker unit, the 171st Air Refueling Squadron, are packing up to leave later in the month for a deployment to the Pacific Ocean region. Under the current Air Force proposals, an additional four KC-135s are to be stationed at Selfridge, in addition to the eight currently at

the base.

"Our fighter squadron, our tanker squadron, civil engineers, security police – you name the squadron, they have been deployed time and time again and have served this nation well," said Col. Michael Thomas, the 127th Wing commander at Selfridge.

"We sent our fighters into the sky on Sept. 11, 2001, and it has not stopped since. Our people are highly-trained, highly-motivated, and to say we are highly-experienced is an understatement."

Detroit Names New CEO of DDOT, Adds 46 Buses

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

DDOT, the Detroit Dept. of Transportation, got a double-dose of good news last week and both initiatives probably couldn't have arrived at a better time for the challenged public transportation hub.

City officials including Mayor Dave Bing introduced 46 new fuel efficient buses last week and that figures to help plug a deficit in running reliable bus fleet service for DDOT.

And the second announcement was that there is a new sheriff in town, so to speak – the city has appointed veteran transportation executive Ron Freeland as DDOT's new chief executive officer (CEO).

"I'm pleased to announce two new arrivals that will enhance our Dept. of Transportation services . . . to our riders," Mayor Bing said in an announcement at the DDOT Shoemaker Terminal on the city's east side, on St. Jean St. near I-94 and Conner.

"The first new arrival is Ron Freeland, who has accepted our invitation to become the new CEO of DDOT. Ron has decades of experience running some of the largest and most complex transportation systems in the United States and we're lucky to have him here."

Freeland previously served



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Ron Freeland, the new CEO of DDOT, announces that 46 buses from Gillig Co. – made in the U.S. – have been acquired and will be in service on city streets soon, as Mayor Dave Bing looks on.

as senior executive and board chair of various bus, ports and rail systems in Maryland and Virginia, and he also worked in New York and California. Freeland is described as a highly sought adviser to state and urban transit systems across the country.

He takes over DDOT in a period of trial and challenge as shrinking budgets, curtailed scheduling, an unreliable bus repair system and other factors have put the ridership at odds

with the city over the delivery of services.

"Welcome, Ron, and we look forward to working with you to turn around Detroit's public transit system," Mayor Bing said. "There's much work to be done and I want to thank you and your team for working to keep the fares the same while continuing to improve service for our DDOT riders."

"Our second new arrival is the first installment of our newest fleet of 46 buses – they are made in America by the Gillig Co. and I know they'll be

tough enough to handle the Detroit streets and the Detroit winters.

"These buses are powered by the world's cleanest and most efficient diesel engines. The buses started arriving around the end of January and have been tested and are being prepared for service."

"Our drivers are training now and we'll be putting them into service over the next several days. Ron, consider these new buses as your 'welcome wagon' to the city of Detroit."

Freeland said he was delighted to be a member of the Mayor's team and he looked forward to the challenge of running the bus fleet. Doing more with less at DDOT will be Freeland's ongoing challenge.

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