



Evaluation in October 2005, and in total the wing flew nearly 2,700 sorties, including 170 in support of Operation Noble Eagle, thereby amassing more than 3,800 flying hours. The 123rd Fighter Squadron was the first ANG F-15 unit to surpass the mark of 70,000 accident-free flight hours and, to commemorate this milestone, the unit received the Aviation Excellence Award from Boeing on 7 July 2005.

By the end of 2006, the 142nd FW could show a mission-capable rate of 78 percent, exceeding the ANG standard of 73 percent and indicative of the organisation's superior maintenance.

BRAC 2005

The four previous Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) rounds in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995 brought about 97 major closures, 55 major realignments and 235 minor actions. According to officials, closing and realigning these installations saved American taxpayers about \$18 billion through fiscal 2001 and a further \$7 billion per year since. A BRAC report submitted in March 2004 estimated that there was a 24 percent excess capacity in the DOD. BRAC 2005 was aimed to allow defence officials to maximise both war-fighting capability and efficiency through joint organisational and basing solutions that will facilitate multi-service missions, reduce excess capacity, save money and redirect resources to modernise equipment and infrastructure, and to develop the capabilities to meet 21st century threats.

This time the Air National Guard was being targeted, with plans to remove aircraft from 22 units across the nation, and Oregon was not to be left out. The plan was to realign Portland International Airport Air Guard Station, whereby the 939th Air Refueling Wing would distribute its KC-135R aircraft to the 507th Air Refueling Wing (AFRES) at Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma (four aircraft) and the 190th Air Refueling Wing (ANG) at Forbes Field Air Guard Station, Kansas (three aircraft) – both installations with higher military value – while retiring one aircraft to the back-up inventory.

The 142nd Fighter Wing (ANG) would meet the same fate and was to distribute the wing's F-15 aircraft to installations of higher military value, in this case the 177th Fighter Wing (ANG) at Atlantic City, New Jersey (six aircraft) and the 159th Fighter Wing (ANG) at New Orleans ARS, Louisiana (nine aircraft). The 142nd Fighter Wing's expeditionary combat support elements, along with the 244th and 272nd Combat Communications Squadrons (ANG), were to remain at Portland, while the base would continue to support a homeland defence alert commitment by stationing a NORAD Fighter Alert Detachment equipped with two aircraft. The argument was that, by relocating the geographically separated Air National Guard squadron to New Orleans, the Air Force could best utilise available facilities on the installation while reducing the cost of leasing facilities in the community.

Flying high – recently threatened with extinction under the BRAC proposals, the 142nd Fighter Wing is now to expand its mission after a hard-fought battle by Oregon's military commanders and politicians alike. Defending the large urban areas in the northwest is the wing's primary role.

The Portland Community, including its elected representatives, reacted and strongly argued that the Portland Air National Guard base should remain intact as the proposed realignment would put the alert force structure below the pre-9/11 posture, leaving the Northwest's population centres, airline traffic and maritime routes vulnerable to future threats. It was argued that the homeland defence mission of the 142nd was not adequately factored into the BRAC military value selection criteria. Since 1985, the alert units at Castle, McChord and Klamath Falls had been shut down, and the lack of nearby fighters and the distances involved (from Mountain Home, Fresno or Hill) would make a timely response of additional resources to major population centres and/or critical infrastructure cumbersome. The community also argued that the realignment would make no economic sense because there were no real personnel savings.

Moreover, it is a known fact that Air National Guard fighter units run exceptionally efficient flying operations – on average 10 percent more efficient than the Active Component. The 142nd FW even tops that with a calculated 20 percent greater efficiency.