

Air National Guard breaks ground for hangar (The News Journal)

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\$33 million project to be finished in 2011

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Sinking their silver-tipped ceremonial shovels into the sand, state and local officials Friday broke ground on a \$33 million project to build a maintenance hangar for the Delaware Air National Guard, based at New Castle Airport.

When completed in 2011, the hangar will be 101,000 square feet -- big enough to house any one of the newer, longer versions of the C-130 transport aircraft kept by the Guard.

The unit's current hangar, built in 1952, is too small and plagued with problems, including a leaky roof, inadequate fire suppression system, poor lighting and falling insulation, officials said.

"It is truly a historic day here for us building a new hangar," Brig. Gen. Hugh Broomall, commander of the Delaware Air National Guard, said while noting the unit's 164,455 hours of accident-free flying.

"When you talk about maintenance of aircraft, nobody does it better than the Air National Guard," he said.

The upbeat mood at Friday's groundbreaking marked a change from the somber course the Guard was on just three years ago, when the unit was on the chopping block.

In May 2005, the Guard was listed among 62 major military bases and 775 smaller installations the Pentagon targeted for closing or consolidation to save billions of dollars.

The plan by then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld would have effectively grounded the Air Guard's 166th Airlift Wing and weakened Delaware's ability to handle emergencies and homeland security -- the two main functions of the Guard.

The unit was saved through negotiations by the state's congressional delegation of Sens. Joe Biden and Tom Carper, and Rep. Mike Castle.

Carper and Castle, who were on hand for the ceremony, recalled Friday that on July 8, 2005 they testified in Baltimore before the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

"There was a lot of working to try to switch that decision," said Castle, R-Delaware. "This is a day of vindication. We've come a long way since [that day] and now the Department of Defense agrees with us."

Guard officials said the project will happen in three phases, with the first year costing \$10.8 million to build a basic hangar bay.

The second year will cost \$11.6 million to build maintenance shops on two floors in a U-shape configuration around the bay.

The final phase will build additional work shops for about \$10.4 million.

The project is entirely funded by federal dollars and will meet federal standards for energy efficiency.

Officials

said it will be the first aircraft hangar in the Air Force to have a geothermal heating and cooling system, which takes advantage of constant below-ground temperature by running a glycol-based fluid through pipes beneath the surface. The hangar roof is designed for future installation of solar panels capable of generating all the daytime electricity needed to run the facility.

New

Castle County Executive Chris Coons, who attended the ceremony, praised the green features and said the project was a welcomed local boost.

"For

an Air National Guard wing that has a critical mission both here and abroad, I think this is a fantastic investment," he said.

Other Air Guard projects include:

- A \$1.5 million medical training facility, completed earlier this year.

- A \$2 million security forces building to house the base's defense team, also completed this year.

- A \$1.5 million fuel depot. Construction is under way.

- A 9,000-square-foot information operations center that eventually will expand to 40,000 square feet. Construction will start on this \$3 million facility next year.

- A \$10.8 million apron -- or parking ramp -- for the C-130s, completed a few years ago.

- A \$7 million squadron operations and aeromedical facility, completed in 2000.

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