

State stands to lose new sub chasers

Combined Staff, Wire Reports

The Pentagon has decided on an inland move for the ocean-going communications planes that link the president with nuclear submarines — a move to an Oklahoma base in the district of the congressman who led the successful battle for military aid to the Nicaraguan contras.

Despite the fact that several million dollars already have been spent on facilities for the planes in Maryland and Hawaii — and that it will cost about \$50 million more to base them 1,500 miles inland — they are headed for Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City, hours away from either coast.

Some Pentagon officials are angry over the decision.

"Basing those planes in Oklahoma will make sense as soon as we start basing the submarines in Nebraska," one Navy official grumbled.

And members of Congress, questioning both the motives and the military merit of the Tinker choice, have launched an investigation.

Hawaii's Sen. Daniel Inouye last night called the whole affair "political foolishness" and vowed to fight the attempt to move the communications planes from Hawaii.

Last February, the Pentagon forwarded a \$25.3 million request to Capitol Hill to begin building the E-6 base at Barbers Point Naval Air Station on Oahu, where the Pacific EC-130 squadron is stationed. The introduction of the E-6, a modified Boeing 707, would require new hangars and other support facilities because it is twice as

large as the EC-130 it will replace, the Navy told Congress.

The Navy said early last year that after more than three years of planning for the Hawaii base, construction would begin in January 1987. Work on a similar \$30 million complex slated for the Atlantic TACAMO squadron would start about two years later at its home base at the Patuxent River Naval Air Test Center, Maryland, Navy budget documents said.

But the Knight-Ridder news service, quoting congressional staffers, reported that within weeks of its arrival on Capitol Hill, the funding proposal for the E-6 coastal bases died a quiet death as budget pressures forced the Navy to cut its request. About the same time, reports surfaced that the Navy was considering consolidating the E-6s at an inland base to cut costs.

A Navy media relations spokesman in Hawaii said yesterday that he has heard of no announcement to move the existing air reconnaissance squadron in the Pacific, which consists of seven planes and some 600 Navy personnel at Barbers Point.

That assessment was verified in Washington by a Navy official who asked not to be identified.

"There's been a lot of speculation in the press about where it's going, but right now we have no official comment on it," that official said.

Reached at his Maryland home last night, Inouye said:

See N-sub on Page A-4

WA 7/14/87 A-4

N-sub link to go inland

Hawaii loses — and Oklahoma wins

from page one

"This matter is not only being seriously studied, but efforts will be made — and I'm going to be part of that effort — to base those planes where they should be.

"It's one thing to set up Boy Scout camps around the country — but when you're setting up bases of vital importance to our national security, the decision-making process should be taken out of the political arena."

So how does such a decision get made?

Ask Rep. Mickey Edwards, R-Okla. He takes full credit for convincing the Reagan administration to base the planes in his home district.

Edwards told his constituents how he used his clout as the senior Republican on a key House panel to force the Navy to consider Tinker as a base for the Navy planes. His maneuver came only six days before the critical vote on the contras.

He also told of how outgoing Navy Secretary John F. Lehman Jr. gave him "personal assurances" a week after the vote that the planes would be based in Oklahoma, three months before Lehman made the decision official.

In timing that Edwards acknowledges was "extraordinarily peculiar," the following sequence of events occurred:

● On May 1, 1986, an internal Navy document says the Air Force has offered to let the Navy base the planes at one of 20 locations where it has extra room; the Navy narrows that



Rep. Mickey Edwards
Oklahoman backed contras

list to seven bases. Tinker is not on either list.

● On June 19, Edwards announces that the House Appropriations Committee's military construction subcommittee — on which he serves as ranking Republican — has ordered the Navy to add Tinker to its list of bases being considered. Edwards says the panel issued the order at his request.

● On June 24, President Reagan, in a televised address from the Oval Office, urges support for Edwards' amendment permitting the United States to ship weapons to the contras.

After the speech, Reagan, aided by Edwards, engages in



Sen. Daniel Inouye
"Political foolishness"

extensive personal lobbying to sway undecided lawmakers into his camp.

"I was having strategy sessions, lining up votes, talking to (White House chief of staff) Don Regan about the president's involvement and getting him to make phone calls to people," Edwards recalled this week.

● On June 25, Edwards leads a successful effort to reverse an earlier House action barring military aid to the contras. The 221-to-209 vote marks the first time the House ever has gone on record supporting military aid to the Nicaraguan rebels. It is widely acknowledged to be

one of Reagan's most significant congressional victories.

"We can be proud that we as a people have embraced the struggle of the freedom fighters of Nicaragua — today their cause is our cause," Reagan says after the victory.

● On July 2, seven days after the vote, Edwards announces the Navy has decided that Tinker is the best base for the planes.

The choice was made after "more than two months of private conversations between (Edwards) and key administration decision-makers," Edwards' office says.

Edwards insisted his role in winning the battle for contra aid played no role in the basing decision.

"It had never occurred to me that there was that sort of overlap," he said this week. "I've supported aid to the contras all along."

"We just don't discuss those kinds of meetings and discussions," White House spokesman Don Mathes said. "We don't go into the kind of discussions that (White House) congressional liaison people might have with the Hill, or the kinds of factors, considerations and concerns that might be discussed or taken under consideration when this kind of thing is decided."

The planes that have caused this turmoil are dedicated solely to relaying attack orders from the commander in chief to submerged ballistic missile submarines.

Advertiser staff writer Will Hoover contributed to this report.