

Success Made Possible by Persistence, Teamwork and Cooperation.

Since 1981, the men and women of the 325th Fighter Wing at Tyndall Air Force Base have made significant contributions to our national defense, preparing our best fighter pilots for air-to-air combat in our best fighter jets. Thousands of military members associated with the F-15 and their families have become part of our local community over a period of nearly three decades.

But in September 2008, the community received some troubling news. The Air Force announced its intention to retire 248 legacy aircraft as part of a critical cost-cutting initiative. Seventeen bases across the country would be affected by this reduction, including Tyndall, which was set to lose 48 F-15s – the entire air superiority training program – by October 1, 2009.

Since that announcement was made, much work has been accomplished by the community, our congressional leaders and the Bay Defense Alliance in pursuit of a replacement mission.

Working together, we formulated a strategy based on three key objectives: slow the drawdown initiative as long as possible in order to identify and obtain a replacement mission; secure a commitment from the Air Force that no other missions would be relocated from Tyndall; and ensure that Air Force leadership fully understood the unique military and community value contributed by Tyndall Air Force Base.

I'm pleased to tell you that this strategy has been successfully executed.

On June 22, 2009, Congressman Allen Boyd brought Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz and Air Force Secretary Michael Donley to Tyndall Air Force Base to see the value the base has on our community and our defense posture. This was the first-ever combined visit to our community by both the service chief and secretary. An outstanding delegation of community leaders presented the Chief and Secretary with resolutions of support signed by every Mayor, County Commissioner and leaders of our Chambers of Commerce and Economic Development Alliance.

In the months that followed, Congressman Boyd hosted frequent meetings with the Bay Defense Alliance "Tyndall Team" and he met with General Schwartz on several occasions. He included language in the final defense appropriations bill that successfully postponed the drawdown from October 1, 2009 until April 1, 2010.

During the same time, the BDA hired General William Looney III (USAF ret) and retired Major General Andy Love (ret) to analyze the best and most viable flying mission alternatives for Tyndall. They developed for presentation to Air Force leadership and promoted details in all the right places.

With the drawdown successfully postponed and the Air Force 100% briefed on the operational advantages of Tyndall and the Bay County community, the final objective of our strategy was to secure a viable follow-on mission to replace the F-15 fighters.

The Air Force has officially announced plans to move an additional twenty-one F-22 Raptors and 589 jobs to Tyndall, successfully accomplishing the third and final objective of our strategy. According to General William Looney, III (USAF ret), fifty F-22 aircraft on the ramp will further solidify Tyndall reputation as the *5th generation fighter center of excellence* and secure the base well into the future.

This was a community effort and, as such, is a community victory. More than 1,600 volunteer hours have been logged by Bay Defense Alliance members since this initiative began. Congressman Boyd's ability to form valuable relationships on behalf of the community and his years of experience navigating the terrain in Washington paved the way for this achievement. The unyielding support of the Bay County Board of Commissioners, our cities, mayors and so many local officials and citizens has been simply outstanding.

Over the coming months, the 325th Fighter Wing will make the necessary arrangements to receive the additional aircraft and the Air Force must complete a mandatory environmental impact assessment or study. While these processes are taking place, the Bay Defense Alliance, along with our Congressional leaders, local officials and members of the entire Bay County community, stand ready to continue supporting our military installations in any capacity we possibly can. Thanks to all who share the sense of pride we enjoy as host to our military neighbors.