

REGIONAL

Kent officials hear chopper presentation

Discuss plan to move state police helicopter from Centreville

By **CRAIG O'DONNELL**
Special from The Kent News

CHESTERTOWN — Sheriff John Price was upset. For the second time, he missed a presentation about relocating Maryland State Police medevac helicopter Trooper 6 from Centreville to Easton.

On Tuesday, July 28, he came to the county commissioners meeting at 9:45 a.m., the time scheduled for state police Maj. A.J. McAndrew. Commission President Roy Crow decided at 9 a.m. to move the time up, and the three people from the state were already gone.

"For the record, I wish to express my concern," he told the commissioners. The state police "numbers don't reflect our peak time" for crashes and other mishaps. McAndrew's statistics covered November 2008 to May 2009; in Kent County, Price said, but May to October have the most ambulance and medevac calls.

"Is this kind of a done deal?" he asked. EMS and fire personnel who have talked with him are "about 50-50" for and against, he said. "I think it's a terrible idea."

"I agree," said Commissioner William Pickrum.

Price said he missed the July 7 meeting at the Chester River Hospital Center because he wasn't notified.

McAndrew, commander of state police aviation, showed PowerPoint slides identical to those shown July 7 and 9 in Chestertown and Easton. It analyzed what locations are within a 25-minute flight of medevac bases. He was accompanied by Jim Brown, the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical System Services public information officer, and by Deputy Director Pat Gainer.

Director Bob Bass was slated to attend, but had a meeting conflict, McAndrew said.

The state police have presented the relocation as a matter of crew safety. The Centreville landing pad, said McAndrew, has numerous disadvantages, while Easton Airport's only drawback is \$37,500 a year for hangar space.

The idea comes on the heels of a September medevac crash that killed four people. The chopper went down during bad weather near Andrews Air Force Base, during an instrument-landing approach with no one in the control tower.

Easton has instrument-landing equipment, but like Andrews AFB, its tower is not manned round-the-clock. Trooper 6 would make foul weather approaches under the same circumstances.

However, the airport is much easier for takeoffs and landings com-

pared to the helipad at Centreville barrack.

An accident investigation of the September crash is not complete and no cause has been pinpointed. McAndrew said a majority of helicopter crashes nationwide are due to pilot error.

Pickrum, a retired helicopter pilot, said he did not see good reasons to rule out a base at Bay Bridge Airport or in Ridgely. The presentation contained nothing at all on those alternatives. "Why have you ruled out Bay Bridge and Ridgely? When you're looking at your mission" the other airports might be as good or better, he said.

McAndrew said his pilots told him they are not as good: "We've looked at them ... we did consider that." After several minutes' discussion, Pickrum said, "We'll have to agree to disagree."

Because new rules don't allow flying accident victims if they can be taken to a trauma center within 30 minutes by ambulance, chopper calls have dropped from about 5,000 a year to 2,100. As a result, Trooper 1 from Baltimore should be available more often to cover parts of Kent County in addition to Trooper 6.

When the DNR's aviation unit was disbanded in the spring, its Easton hangar became available. McAndrew asked the MIEMSS board in May to approve moving the helicopter. In turn, they asked for

him to schedule public meetings before a planned decision July 14.

After a delay of nearly two months, they were held in Chestertown and Easton less than four working days before the MIEMSS July meeting. None of the county commissioners attended the July 7 meeting.

On July 14 MIEMSS tentatively approved the new base pending more public comment. A meeting with the Kent commissioners was scheduled as a result.

At the July 7 Chestertown meeting, former county commissioner Alex Rasin said moving the helicopter looked to be a "tradeoff" between crew safety and public safety in northern Kent County.

Also at the Chestertown meeting, local EMS personnel did not agree whether it is possible to reach the Christiana trauma center within 30 minutes by ambulance from eastern Kent and Cecil counties.

Asked Tuesday if he had an answer to that concern, McAndrew said he did not.

Whether or not the base is changed, McAndrew said the state plans to buy three replacement helicopters for about \$53 million with money appropriated last year by the General Assembly. By December 2010, the state police are required to deliver a new study of medevac base locations, and MIEMSS and McAndrew plan to add co-pilots and a second flight EMT to each chopper starting in 2011.

Commissioners given helicopter presentation

Some questions remain unanswered

By Craig O'Donnell
codonnell@chespub.com

CHESTERTOWN — Sheriff John Price was upset.

For the second time, he missed a presentation about relocating medevac helicopter Trooper 6 from Centreville to Easton.

On Tuesday, he came to the county commissioners meeting at 9:45 a.m., the time scheduled for state police Maj. A.J. McAndrew.

Commission President Roy Crow decided at 9 a.m. to move the time up, and the three people from the state were already gone.

"For the record, I wish to express my concern," he told the commissioners. The state police "numbers don't reflect our peak time" for crashes and other mishaps. McAndrew's statistics covered November through May,

2008-09; in Kent County, Price said, but May through October have the most ambulance and medevac calls.

"Is this a kind of a done deal?" he asked. EMS and fire personnel who have talked with him are "about 50-50" for and against, he said. "I think it's a terrible idea."

"I agree," said Commissioner William Pickrum.

Price said he missed the July 7 meeting at the Chester River Hospital Center because he wasn't notified.

McAndrew, commander of the Maryland State Police aviation division, showed PowerPoint slides identical to those shown July 7 and 9 in Chestertown and Easton. It analyzed what locations are within a 25-minute flight of medevac bases.

(See HELICOPTER, Page A20)

agreed; he said, "I thought that was a good response."

Also at the Chestertown meeting, local EMS personnel did not agree whether it is possible to reach the Christiansburg, Del., trauma center within 30 minutes by ambulance from eastern Kent and Cecil counties.

Asked Tuesday if he had an answer to that concern, McAndrew said he did not.

Whether or not the base is changed, McAndrew plans to buy three replacement helicopters for about \$53 million with money appropriated last year by the General Assembly. By December 2010, the state police are required to deliver a new study of medevac base locations, and MIEMSS and McAndrew plan to add co-pilots and a second flight EMT to each chopper starting in 2011.

moving the helicopter. In turn, they asked for him to schedule public meetings before a planned decision July 14. After a delay of nearly two months, they were held in Chestertown and Easton less than four working days before the MIEMSS July meeting. None of the county commissioners attended the July 7 meeting.

On July 14 MIEMSS tentatively approved the new base pending more public comment. A meeting with the Kent commissioners was scheduled as a result.

At the July 7 Chestertown meeting, former county commissioner Alex Rasin said moving the helicopter looked to be a "tradeoff" between crew safety and public safety in northern Kent County. At the time, McAndrew replied, "I disagree."

Tuesday he was asked why he dis-

"Why have you ruled out Bay Bridge and Ridgely? When you're looking at your mission" the other airports might be as good or better, he said.

McAndrew said his pilots told him they are not as good: "We've looked at them ... we did consider that." After several minutes' discussion, Pickrum said, "We'll have to agree to disagree."

Because new rules don't allow flying crash victims if they can be taken to a trauma center within 30 minutes by ambulance, chopper calls have dropped from about 5,000 a year to 2,100. As a result, Trooper 1 from Baltimore should be available more often to cover parts of Kent County in addition to Trooper 6.

When the Department of Natural Resources' aviation unit was disbanded in the spring, its Easton hangar became available. McAndrew asked the MIEMSS board in May to approve

Force Base, during an instrument-landing approach with no one in the control tower.

Easton has instrument-landing equipment, but like Andrews AFB, its tower is not manned round-the-clock. Trooper 6 would make foul weather approaches under the same circumstances.

However, the airport is much easier for takeoffs and landings compared to the helipad at the Centreville barracks.

An accident investigation of the September crash is not complete and no cause has been pinpointed. McAndrew said a majority of helicopter crashes nationwide are due to pilot error.

Pickrum, a retired helicopter pilot, said he did not see good reasons to rule out a base at Bay Bridge Airport or in Ridgely. The presentation contained nothing at all on those alternatives.

HELICOPTER

(Continued from Page A1)

He was accompanied by Jim Brown, the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical System Services public information officer, and by Deputy Director Pat Gainer.

Director Bob Bass was slated to attend, but had a meeting conflict, McAndrew said.

The state police have presented the relocation as a matter of crew safety. The Centreville landing pad, said McAndrew, has numerous disadvantages, while Easton Airport's only drawback is \$37,500 a year for hangar space.

The idea comes on the heels of a September medevac crash that killed four people. The chopper went down during bad weather near Andrews Air



Kent County News

Editorial

July 23, 2009

A4

Helicopter will relocate

It seems almost certain that the base of operations for the Maryland State Police medevac helicopter for this area, Trooper 6, will move from Centreville to Easton.

Trooper 6 covers a large section of the Eastern Shore. It is part of an 11-helicopter state squadron.

The change will cut coverage in a small northeastern area of Kent County which would then be out of the 25-minute response time. The trip would also be lengthened, and thus response time increased, for other areas in Kent, owing to the 16-mile relocation. Trooper 1, stationed near Baltimore, could help cover but it is often busy on the western shore.

The move, according to a spokesperson at a public meeting here last month, will improve safety for helicopter crews. Easton airport provides a less cluttered base with a control tower and better equipment for the helicopters. The move comes after a crash last year caused four deaths.

We are sympathetic to the safety of the brave men and women who often fly through difficult conditions, on tense and complex life-and-death missions. We also know that other factors can improve crew safety, such as additional personnel and newer helicopters, both of which are being proposed.

However, the population of the state, and the Eastern Shore is growing, particularly with the development associated with BRAC in Harford County. That development that will have a ripple affect throughout the area. Is this really the time to reduce service anywhere? The need was particularly telling after a car crash near Rock Hall in June, when not two but three helicopters were initially paged.

It was also disconcerting to see that the public hearings to solicit input were scheduled July 7 in Chestertown and July 9 in Easton, just five days – with a weekend thrown in – before the Maryland Emergency Medical Services Systems board was scheduled to make a decision.

That is not much time to evaluate public sentiment. The decision now is being delayed until the Kent County Commissioners are heard.

It is probably moot. As the spokesperson, who clearly supports the move, said in Chestertown: "I haven't heard anything tonight that would change my mind."

JULY 16, 2009

PAGE A11

McAndrew proposes moving Chopper 6

By CHRIS KNAUSS

Special to the Record Observer

EASTON — Major A.J. McAndrew was there and saw the four lifeless bodies when the Trooper 2 Medevac helicopter crashed in September 2008. In his 26 years in law enforcement, it was the worst day of McAndrew's career. As commander of the Maryland State Police Aviation Command, he does not want to witness that scene again.

McAndrew presented his case for relocating Trooper 6 at a public meeting Thursday evening, July 9, at the Easton Volunteer Fire Department. To improve safety for his crews, McAndrew would like authorization to move Trooper 6 from Centreville to Easton Airport.

"I had to go visit the widows of my pilots and medics, and hold their children as they cried about their daddy not being able to come home any more," said McAndrew, "and I'll be damned if I'm going to pass up an opportunity to prevent something like that from happening again."

After the presentation, representatives from civic, government and emergency service organizations in Caroline, Talbot, and Dorchester counties all praised the record of the state police's helicopter service and offered their support for the move. Only one Hyde Park resident, concerned about possible noise problems, voiced opposition to the move.

Dr. Bob Bass, director of the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services

Systems, opened the meeting and introduced McAndrew. Bass and the MIEMSS board will decide whether to move the helicopter after having received public comment through July 14, the day they met to discuss the matter.

McAndrew said Maryland's Medevac program began in 1970 and was the first non-military emergency helicopter unit in the United States.

"We've since transported over 130,000 patients, literally saving thousands upon thousands of lives," he said.

The helicopters also are used for search and rescue, law enforcement, homeland security and damage assessment. The price for the helicopters' medical service is \$5 out of all vehicle registrations in Maryland, said McAndrew.

"I challenge you to find a cheaper insurance policy than that," he said.

Currently there are seven active helicopter bases in Maryland and 11 helicopters in service. The Centreville heliport is the only active base not operating at an airport.

McAndrew said since the state police have taken over the Department of Natural Resources' helicopter responsibilities, the ex-DNR hangar at Easton Airport is now available and offers an opportunity to improve safety for his crews. The current heliport in Centreville is surrounded by public roads with uncontrolled access, power lines, a 911 tower, a nearby gas station, and occupied buildings.

"It poses many obstacles for our pilots," said McAndrew.

"We've been flying out of this hangar for, I believe, 24 years and we've never had an incident. That's a testament to the skill of our pilots. ... But you know, if God forbid, one of our guys hit one of those power lines, lost an engine and wasn't able to do a run-on landing, such as you could do at an airport runway, we'd all be sitting around crying, saying we should have taken advantage of moving to an airport when we had the opportunity."

Easton Airport offers a manned control tower, navigational electronics for instrument landings, runways for emergency landings, and an air traffic control radar is planned.

According to McAndrew, Medevac coverage is arranged so there is no more than a 25-minute flight from a base to an

accident when possible. If the helicopter is at the scene in under 25 minutes, victims arrive at a trauma center within an hour 92 percent of the time and are more likely to survive. The 16-mile move will make a trip to northern Kent County and lower Cecil County a few minutes longer. Trooper 1, based at Martin State Airport, also services the area.

The state is beginning to replace its aging helicopter fleet. During its last session, the General Assembly budgeted \$52.5 million for three new helicopters. Nine of the 11 state police aircraft are 20 years old. Once they reach that age, McAndrew said, they spend close to half the time being fixed. McAndrew has also recommended adding another pilot and medic to each crew.

Helicopter move supported in Easton

By Chris Knauss

Special from the Star Democrat

EASTON — Maj. A.J. McAndrew was there and saw the four lifeless bodies when the Trooper 2 Medevac helicopter crashed in September 2008. In his 26 years in law enforcement, it was the worst day of McAndrew's career. As commander of the Maryland State Police Aviation Command, he does not want to witness that scene again.

McAndrew presented his case for relocating Trooper 6 at a public meeting Thursday evening, July 9, at the Easton Volunteer Fire Department. To improve safety for his crews, McAndrew would like authorization to move Trooper 6 from Centreville to Easton Airport.

"I had to go visit the widows of my pilots and medics, and hold their children as they cried about their daddy not being able to come home any more," said McAndrew, "and I'll be damned if I'm going to pass up an opportunity to prevent something like that from happening again."

After the presentation, representatives from civic, government, and emergency service organizations in Caroline, Talbot, and Dorchester counties all praised the record of the state police's helicopter service and offered their support for the move. Only one Hyde Park resident, concerned about possible noise problems, voiced opposition to the move.

Dr. Bob Bass, director of the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, opened the meeting and introduced McAndrew. Bass and the MIEMSS board will decide whether to move the helicopter after reviewing public comments received up to July 14, the day they met to discuss the matter.

McAndrew said Maryland's Medevac program began in 1970 and was the first non-military emergency helicopter unit in the United States.

"We've since transported over 130,000 patients, literally saving thousands upon thousands of lives," he said.

The helicopters also are used

for search and rescue, law enforcement, homeland security and damage assessment. The price for the helicopters' medical service is \$5 out of all vehicle registrations in Maryland, said McAndrew.

"I challenge you to find a cheaper insurance policy than that," he said.

Currently there are seven active helicopter bases in Maryland, and 11 helicopters in service. The Centreville heliport is the only active base not operating at an airport.

McAndrew said since the state police have taken over the Department of Natural Resources' helicopter responsibilities, the ex-DNR hangar at Easton Airport is now available and offers an opportunity to improve safety for his crews. The current heliport in Centreville is surrounded by public roads with uncontrolled access, power lines, a 911 tower, a nearby gas station, and occupied buildings.

"It poses many obstacles for our pilots," said McAndrew. "We've been flying out of this

hangar for I believe 24 years and we've never had an incident. That's a testament to the skill of our pilots. ... But you know, if God forbid, one of our guys hit one of those power lines, lost an engine and wasn't able to do a run-on landing, such as you could do at an airport runway, we'd all be sitting around crying, saying we should have taken advantage of moving to an airport when we had the opportunity."

Easton Airport offers a manned control tower, navigational electronics for instrument landings, runways for emergency landings, and an air traffic control radar is planned.

According to McAndrew, Medevac coverage is arranged so there is no more than a 25-minute flight from a base to an accident when possible. If the helicopter is at the scene in under 25 minutes, victims arrive at a trauma center within an hour 92 percent of the time and are more likely to survive. The 16-mile move will make a trip to northern Kent County and lower Cecil County a few minutes longer. Trooper 1, based at Martin State Airport, also serves the area.

The state is beginning to replace its aging helicopter fleet. During its last session, the General Assembly budgeted \$52.5 million for three new helicopters. Nine of the 11 state police aircraft are 20 years old. Once they reach that age, McAndrew said, they spend close to half the time being fixed.

McAndrew has also recommended adding another pilot and medic to each crew.

Meeting with Kent commissioners sought

By Craig O'Donnell
codonnell@chespub.com

BALTIMORE — At their meeting Tuesday the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical System Services board of directors considered moving Trooper 6, the state police medevac helicopter, to Easton Airport.

Jim Brown, MIEMSS public information officer, said Tuesday the board "tentatively approved the move," but they "are continuing to solicit comment" from the public.

Brown said Maj. A.J. McAndrew and Bob Bass plan to meet with the Kent County commissioners before a final vote.

Bass is MIEMSS executive director and McAndrew is in charge of state police aviation operations.

McAndrew sought a vote on moving the base from the Centreville barrack at the May 12 MIEMSS board meeting. He was asked to get public reaction to the proposal before the board acted. Bass and McAndrew held meetings July 7 and 9, just days before the MIEMSS board was supposed to vote on the move and nearly two months after the state police officer was asked to reach out to local communities.

No date has been set for the appearance before the commissioners.

Record Observer

QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY

RECORD OBSERVER

JULY 16, 2009

PAGE A13

LETTERS

It makes sense to base Trooper 6 at safer airport

As a citizen of Queen Anne's County, I feel that we have been blessed to be the home of MSP Trooper 6 for the past 23 years.

In light of the catastrophic accident of Trooper 2 in Prince George's County on Sept. 27, 2008, we have also been blessed with outstanding pilots who have flown Trooper 6, especially navigating her around the various obstacles around the hanger in Centreville.

Over the years these have increased to include power lines, a 6-foot-high fence, a road on two sides of the too small hanger, the 911 center, a tower, and a gas station. All these have made for unsafe departures and landings.

There is now the opportunity to correct these unsafe conditions by moving Trooper 6 to a larger and safer environment at the Easton Airport which is only six minutes

flight time away. Easton Airport will provide two runways for landing if needed, a control tower operating from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. to control air traffic arriving and departing, no vehicular traffic, and a guidance system which greatly improves safety in inclement weather and low visibility. These last two could prevent Trooper 6 from even responding to an emergency.

Finally, Trooper 6 would have a larger hanger which makes it safer to move her into and out of which reduces response time.

The only down side to moving Trooper 6 to a safer environment is the additional six-minute additional maximum response time that it will take to reach the scene of an emergency.

But, on the other hand, this time is inconsequential if Trooper 6 is ever involved in an incident getting her out of a too small hanger. In this case Trooper 6 would be unable to respond at all.

This six minutes actually becomes a positive as it allows ground personnel more time to prepare a safer landing zone for Trooper 6. Ground personnel also has more time to have the accident patient ready to be flown out. All this and we are still well within the golden hour.

Let us all in Queen Anne's County be thankful for the 23 years that Trooper 6 has been based in Centreville without any accidents or incidents.

At the same time, let us be even more thankful that a much safer home base has been located at the Easton Airport where we can all be better assured of the quality service we have all come to expect from Trooper 6 and the highly skilled and dedicated people who fly her.

Safety is what is most important, and not our selfish pride in being the home base of Trooper 6.

W. DAVID TAYLOR

Barclay