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MILLINGTON STAR

Mixup in cleanup priorities surfaces

Navy to seek means for removing tanks under prime industrial site

By Frank Burrell
Star News Editor

An apparent mixup in Naval Support Activity Memphis environmental cleanup and base redevelopment priorities surfaced last week when Millington officials learned the Navy had no funds earmarked for removal of two large underground fuel tanks from an area of excess property the city had hoped to begin developing during the coming year.

When it became apparent at Tuesday's Restoration Advisory Board meeting that a mixup had occurred, Navy officials agreed to look for ways to overcome the problem, even if it meant shifting priorities from other areas to try to do something about the problem tanks. Efforts to find a solution started the next morning at a joint meeting of city and Navy officials onboard the base.

The issue came up Tuesday night when Jim Ferguson, planner-coordinator for the Millington

Base Re-use Commission, indicated the two 400,000-gallon underground tanks in question could hinder the city's redevelopment plans. NSA representatives responded that they were unaware the city had an immediate interest in that area of the 1,900 acres the Navy plans to make available to the city on the north side of the base.

Earlier in the meeting, David Porter, coordinator of the Base Realignment and Closure Cleanup Team for NSA Memphis, reported that the cleanup team received \$1.3 million less than it had requested for the 1996 fiscal year, which began Oct. 1 and runs through Sept. 30.

Although \$2,882,500 was requested for asbestos removals, tank removals, and solid waste management unit investigations and removals this year, Porter said he did not expect the fact that only \$1,574,000 was allocated to seriously impact restoration work if

the full amount is made up next year.

When Ferguson questioned whether the allocated funds covered removal of the two large tanks between the southwest end of the airport runway and the Illinois Central Railroad tracks, Porter said they did not. In fact, he indicated they were not even included in the overall request for this year. He said the team requested \$1,934,000 for removal of 27 smaller tanks on various portions of the excess property and had been approved for \$1,184,000.

Ferguson said the base re-use plan the city adopted earlier this year calls for development of an industrial/office park around the airport, and the area adjacent to the tanks was the area with the most potential to be developed first.

Capt James A. "Tony" Mallory, NSA commanding officer and presiding chairman of the RAB meet-

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ing, asked Porter if something could be done about the tanks.

In response, Porter said he didn't believe additional funding would be possible. But shifting other funding priorities to the tank removals is a distinct possibility, if that is determined to be what is needed, he added. Representatives of the base Public Works Department said they would have to re-line tanks on the south side to handle reserve boiler fuel stored in one of the tanks.

Frank Ryburn, chairman of the Millington Municipal Airport Authority, who attended both the Tuesday night meeting and the weekly city-Navy joint meeting the next day, said he was optimistic a solution to the underground tank dilemma would be found.

Despite all of the joint meetings the city and Navy have had, Ryburn said, "We apparently still have some communications problems. That piece of property has been a high priority for us all along. They (the Navy) have so many departments, it seems like it's hard to get the word around to everyone that needs to hear it."

"We've been talking back and forth with them every week, but I guess we don't talk about enough things," Ryburn said, then added, "The Navy people were very cooperative and said they would try to speed things up (on the tanks) soon. Emptying and cleaning them apparently is the most time-consuming part of the process."

In explaining why the property around the underground tanks is a priority area for the city, Ryburn said it's the most accessible area of the 1,900 acres the Navy is giving up for development. Saying the area in question probably is no more than 1,000 feet from Navy Road, where city water and sewer lines already exist, he indicated it would be the easiest and least expensive area to extend those lines to and build an access road.

Millington Mayor George R. Harvell Jr. reported Tuesday night that an effort was under way to get fast-track funding approval through the State Legislature for an extension of West Union Road from Highway 51 to the area near the underground tanks, where it would turn south across Navy Road before linking up with either Raleigh-Millington Road or Paul Barret Parkway. The road will turn that (tank) area into prime industrial development property, he added.

In relation to the underground tanks, Russ Noble, former base transition coordinator for the base before retiring from the Navy last year, said the major problem, moreso than the road, would be a railroad spur and industrial loading area planned for that location.

Also, Ferguson said current access through base property can be imposing for outsiders and a deterrent for industrial prospects. Access to the airport area across excess property from Bethuel Road, north of the 600 acres the Navy will keep, would be much longer and no water or sewer lines, nor a road, exist in that area, Ryburn added.

During his airport update report to the advisory board, Ryburn indicated the city's fixed base operator was now experiencing 40-50 plane movements a day and that aviation fuel sales were continuing to increase a little day by day. That was particularly true when the Navy moved 70 jet trainers here from Naval Air Station Meridian, MS, for an overnight stay during the Hurricane Luis threat, he said.

Although Federal Express declined to renew its alternate airport contract with the city, saying it wasn't cost effective, Ryburn said he felt good about where the airport is now in relation to earlier projections.

Ryburn also reported that the Tennessee Aeronautics Commission had approved a 75-percent matching-fund grant for an instru-

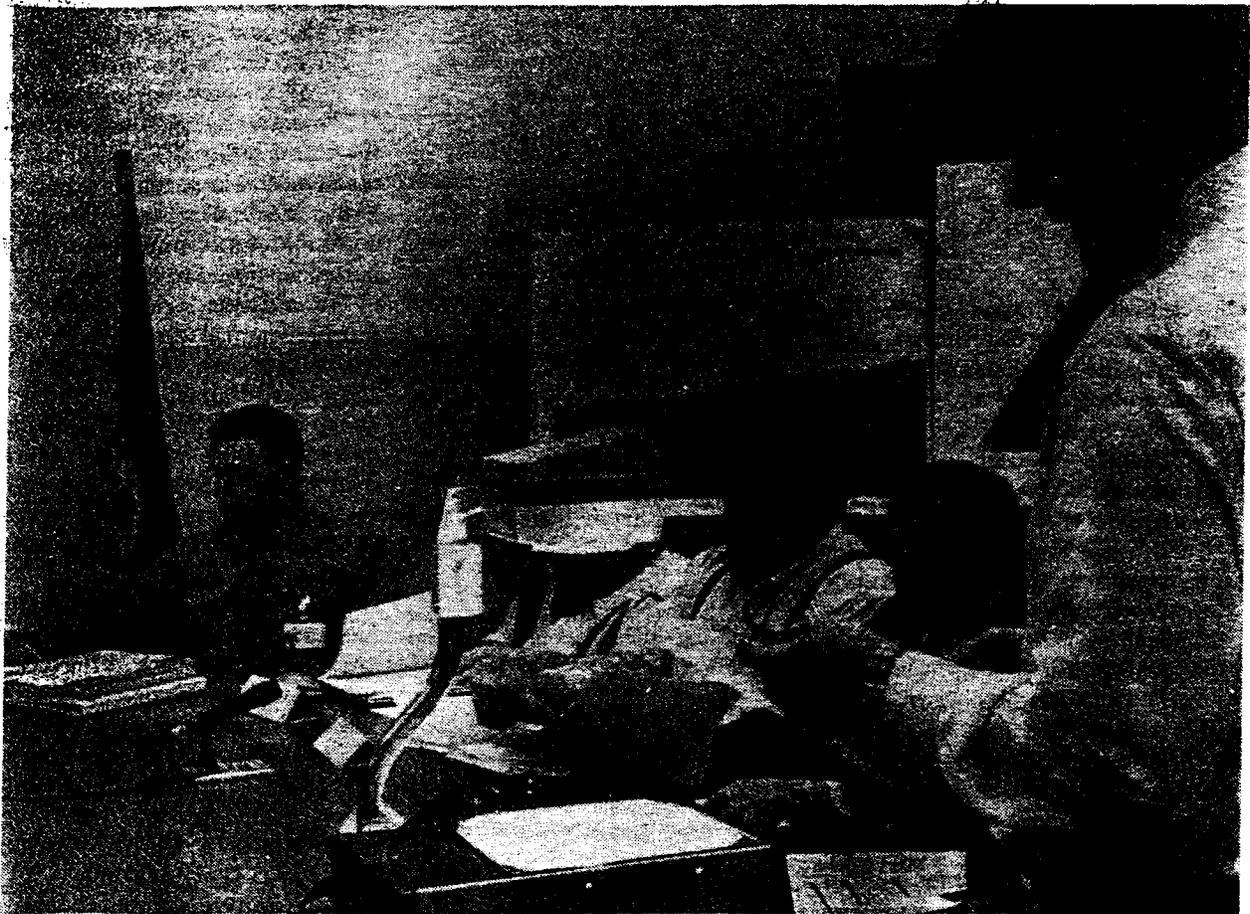
ment landing system the municipal airport operation needs to serve commercial air cargo companies.

In conclusion, he said a long-term lease for continued operation of the former NAS Airfield as a civilian airport remained in the negotiation stage. In the meantime, the airport is operating under an extension of the temporary lease that was in effect for the first year of a joint-use agreement.

During his report to the board, Porter said cleanup of several areas was close to completion and most phases of the corrective action process for NSA Memphis were on schedule. An exception, he said, was the environmental impact statement, which was slightly behind schedule after a delay in receiving the city's base re-use plan.

A draft statement had been expected for presentation at last week's meeting, but will be delayed until the next RAB meeting, which was set for Jan. 23. Following a public hearing and comment period, the final impact statement probably will be ready for approval by the March meeting, Porter added.

In its only vote last week, the board agreed to eliminate one of three information repositories that had been maintained for its activities. Approved for elimination was the repository at the Millington City Hall, which was reserved for RAB members only and had run out of space. The remaining RAB repositories are open to the public at the Millington Branch Library and the NSA Library.



Base cleanup funding outlined

David Porter (standing), coordinator of the BRAC Cleanup Team for Naval Support Activity Memphis at Millington, reviews 1996 budget allocations for asbestos removals, tank removals and solid waste investigations and removals during last week's NSA Memphis Restoration Advisory Board meeting at Baker Commu-

nity Center. Although the cleanup team's budget requests were trimmed from \$2.8 million to \$ 1.5 million, Porter said the shortfall was not expected to seriously impact restoration work at the base if the additional funds needed are allocated next year.

(Frank Burrell photo)