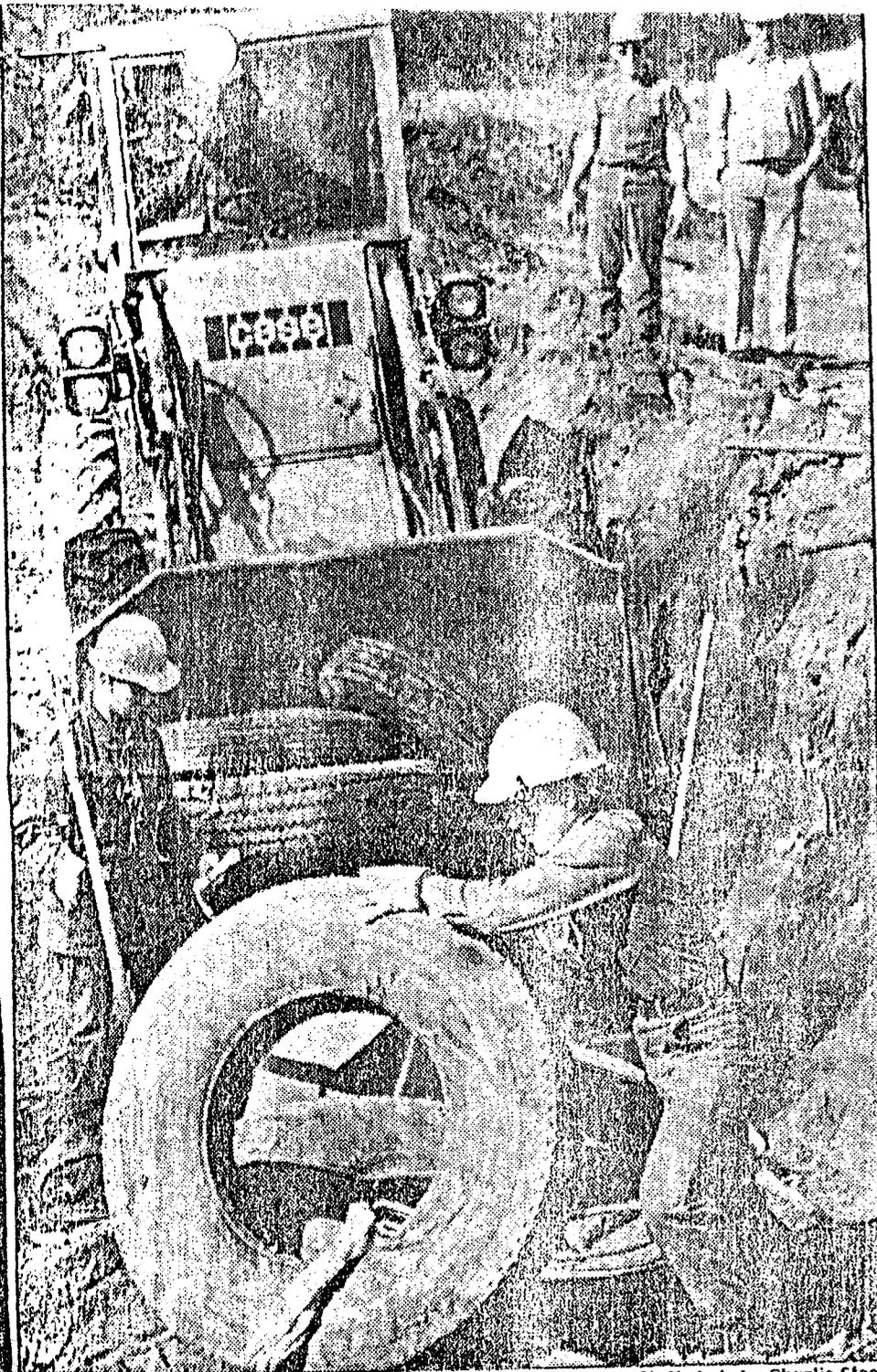


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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "LANDFILL DIG TURNS UP EQUIPMENT" NAS WHITING FIELD FL
11/18/1983
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Staff photo by Charlie Steed

Navy Seabees dig up tires Monday morning which Whiting officials say should not have been in landfill.

WHITING UNDER PROBE
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Landfill dig turns up equipment

By **ROB ALEXANDER**
Journal Staff Writer

WHITING FIELD NAVAL AIR STATION — Navy Seabees dug through a base landfill Monday to uncover "evidence" of potential fraud or abuse of government property in what the base commander said is an intense investigation of allegations made last fall.

FBI and Navy investigators are probing reports that upwards of \$100,000 worth of government property may have been intentionally buried in the base's landfill, said Capt. Giles Norrington, Whiting Field commander.

Agents have not identified a motive, but Norrington said they will consider whether disgruntled former government workers might have tried to discredit the military in a reaction to layoffs among civil service personnel last September.

That speculation drew an angry reaction from Ralph Madden, president of the Whiting local of the American Federation of Government Employees union.

"That ain't even close to the truth," said Madden, a parts supplier on the base. He said civilian workers were told by the military to clean out their shelves of old supplies before a private contractor took over maintenance and other services previously handled by civil service workers on the base, north of Milton.

"That stuff would not have been dumped out had it been up to the civilians," said Madden.

Norrington said two families are suspected of involvement, although no charges have been filed. Suspects include military personnel in positions of responsibility and former civil servants, some of whom may now be working for the private contractor hired to replace some civil service operations as a cost-cutting move, he said.

The Navy laid off about 100 civil service workers when RCA Base Support Services Inc. began operations under a private contract Oct 1. It was a day Norrington said he

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Section 101

Hazardous fuel traced to base

By **ROB ALEXANDER**
Journal Staff Writer

WHITING FIELD NAVAL AIR STATION — A Navy investigation has found no involvement of air station personnel in the sale of a mixture of kerosene and gasoline to a Pace appliance store, base commander Capt. Giles Norrington said Monday.

The investigation is unrelated to the current probe into the dumping of government property at the air station landfill, Norrington said Monday.

"At this point we have found no involvement of Navy or civilian service personnel," he said.

The sale of the hazardous mixture drew warnings from fire officials in Santa Rosa County last week after a state fire marshal's investigation found kerosene sold from a 55-gallon drum at the Otasco Associate Store was mixed with gasoline. The store re-called the contaminated kerosene and offered customers a full refund.

Capt. C.E. Ellison of the Milton Fire Department said the drum was purchased from several men working at Whiting Field. "I don't think they have completed their investigation," he said.

Whiting spokesman Bruce Blakeman said the investigation isn't over.

Meanwhile, Bob Brooks, owner of Otasco in Pace, said all of the contaminated fuel has been returned or used up. He said he did not know where he bought the fuel and that the investigations are still under way.

He said the issue was blown out of proportion. There were no injuries reported from the use of the mixture. Ellison said a call was prompted after the owner of a kerosene heater in Harold said he wasn't able to turn off his heater on the night of Monday. He placed it outside where it burned through the night, said Ellison.

Fire investigators later found the fuel used in the heater was mixed with gasoline and other inflammable liquids, Ellison

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Whiting

remembers as the worst in his life. Many of those let go had served in the civil service for more than a decade, he said.

"In the main, this was a smooth transition . . . there were an awful lot of people who felt they had been betrayed by the military," Norrington said during a morning news conference.

The allegations surfaced earlier in September when a civilian worker was found with government automotive parts in the back of his car during a random drug search at a gate leading to the base, Norrington said.

The Navy filed a complaint of theft of government property against the worker. The worker or an associate of his then told U.S. attorneys that other property could be found in the landfill. Norrington said. In November the FBI was brought into the case and began interviewing potential witnesses, he said.

The waste charges arose at the same time the Navy conducted a complete inventory of what equipment would go to RCA and what would be returned to the supply system, Norrington said. The Defense Department also received a tip on its toll-free waste hotline that property was improperly being disposed of at Whiting, he added.

"My people have been working virtually around the clock to find out what we have on our

Fraud charges could be pressed if evidence shows a former worker intentionally buried the material and then attempted "to blow the whistle on a person doing no wrong," he said.

The dumping of usable material in the landfill became "the joke of the base," said Madden, and was done under the supervision of military personnel.

At the paint shop where he worked, Madden said civilians were

told to throw out their old supplies. "But before the hour was over it was, 'no, get it all,' and damn near all of it was gone."

He asked: "How can 200 and something civil service workers start looting, and that was what it was, and haul it to the dump without t h e e i r knowledge? . . . Everything was in the wide open of what we were doing out there."

Navy construction workers, known as

Seabees, began the first major excavation of the 15-foot-deep trench last Thursday and pulled out about two truckloads of material of which a small portion appeared to be usable property, such as tires and wiring and automotive radiators, said Norrington. An Assistant U.S. Attorney Friday recommended the entire 150-by-200 foot section of landfill be uncovered, he said.

"We are pulling everything out of the hole that has mass to it,"

Norrington said. "We are taking it to our supply department. We are washing it down and we're examining it for serial numbers, value . . . Some of the things that are coming out of that hole appear to have been improperly disposed of."

At the landfill located near the air station's western boundary, eight Seabees working with two bulldozers Monday morning clawed through the red mud to uncover coils of electrical wire,

packing paper and at least eight new heavy truck tires.

The tires, for example, should have never been placed in the landfill, Norrington said, because even old tires are usually recycled.

He said investigators do not yet know if the material was dumped at night or during daily operations, or placed in

dumpsters on the base before the dumpsters were in turn dumped at the landfill. But someone should have noticed and reported that new or usable property was being buried, he said.

"We don't know who did what yet," Norrington said, while surveying the excavation Monday. "We only know what we're digging up."

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NUMBER 143**

Landfill dig turns up evidence

