US Army Corps of Engineers
Baltimore District

The Corps pondent

A newsletter by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the residents of Spring Valley

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Corps unearths unfused munition

by Col. Bruce Berwick
Commander &
District Engineer

As I promised in the first issue of this newsletter in December, we will attempt to keep you fully informed of our activities at the property on Glenbrook Road.

By now, I'm sure you have read the news articles about the recent find in the backyard of that property. I want to give you the most recent information on what happened.

Munition discovered

On Feb. 16, after 1 p.m., while our contractor was preparing the site for the planned intrusive investigation beginning in March, ordnance specialists from the Corps unearthed a 75mm unfused projectile in the backyard of the property.

Our planned intrusive investigation is focused on the two anomalies that are possible suspect burial sites for chemical warfare material. Other anomalies had been previously identified in our geophysical survey, but were not indicative of a burial pit.

At the request of the State Department, our specialists were working to verify the nature of all anomalies on the property when the discovery occurred at one of these locations.

All preparatory work stopped immediately at the site. After the Army's Tech Escort unit from Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., arrived, they determined the munition was stable and unfused. Initially, it was characterized as a possible smoke round containing no chemical agent.

Tech Escort placed the munition in a sealed container and moved it to the Interim Holding Facility located off Dalecarlia Parkway.

After further testing that evening and the next day with x-rays and a neutron-emitting device, Tech Escort determined that the munition was not chemical.

The munition was removed from the Interim Holding Facility the evening of Feb. 17 and transferred to Andrews Air Force Base by the Fort McNair Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit.

Additional tests on Feb. 18 confirmed that the munition was empty. It was transported to Fort AP Hill, Va., for final disposition.

No evacuations

No residents in the community were required to evacuate, but we did notify the residents at the site location and next door to allow them the opportunity to leave their homes if they wished.

Site preparation, including the removal of trees and construction of a temporary road, continued the following day.

The vapor containment structure will be constructed the last week in February, and hand digging at the two anomalies of interest is scheduled to begin the middle of March.

Presently, we are still on schedule with our planned work; however, it is too soon to know whether this unexpected discovery could possibly prolong the completion of the project.

Col. Bruce A. Berwick

As always, I want to emphasize our commitment to conduct this investigation as safely as possible.

We will continue to do everything we can to ensure that the community is safe and disruption is kept to a minimum as we conduct our work.

If you have any concerns or want regular updates of our work, please call our Spring Valley Information Line at 1-800-434-0988, or visit our web site at **http://www.nab.usace.army.mil/environmental/springvalley.htm.**

The vapor containment structure was used during excavation work at Wesley Seminary in 1994.

Vapor Containment Structure

As an added measure of safety during the Corps' follow-up investigation in Spring Valley, engineers will use a control known as the vapor containment structure.

Delivered prefabricated and erected on site, this dome-like structure will be built over the areas where excavation work will be done at the Glenbrook Road site.

Constructed of metal and outfitted with an activated carbon filtration system, the vapor containment structure has been tested and proven to successfully contain and filter vapors from chemical warfare agents or chemical-filled munitions.

It is also designed to safely contain the accidental detonation of a small and medium-sized military munition.

The vapor containment structure greatly reduces the number of residents potentially affected by this investigation.

It also provides an increased measure of safety and protection to Spring Valley residents and workers at or near the site should any remnants of past defense activities be found.

The vapor containment structure will be 30 feet wide by 20 feet long by 17 feet high. Officials estimate it will take two weeks to erect it.

A similar containment structure was used as part of the Phase II investigation in 1994 of Wesley Seminary.

Safety Precautions

All intrusive work to identify the two potential burial pits will be performed by the Army's Tech Escort Unit from Aberdeen Proving Ground.

This is the same unit that performed the excavations during Phase I in 1993 and responded to the recent munition find on Feb. 16.

The two anomalies will be investigated one at a time.

Two soldiers will perform hand excavation inside the vapor containment structure, and will wear Level B protection gear.

There are several banks of filters within the structure, and air will be monitored continuously at three locations:

1) within the vapor containment structure,

2) within the banks of filters, and

3) at the filter exhaust.

The project will be supported by a mobile command unit at the site with communications to the staging area trailers at the federal property behind Sibley Hospital (off Dalecarlia Parkway), medical response personnel and emergency preparedness organizations.

Maj. Brian Plaisted has been designated deputy district engineer for Spring Valley, and will be the on-site operations officer in the support zone or at the staging area throughout the duration of the activities.

There are armed guards at the site 24 hours a day.

There has been extensive coordination with the District of Columbia government and American University for assistance with parking, traffic control and other issues.

The 75mm unfused projectile found on Feb. 16 in the backyard of 4801 Glenbrook Road.

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Official Business

Schedule for work

Mobilize to site. . . . . Feb. 15

- Set up facilities at Staging Area
- Cut down trees
- Erect vapor containment structure

Begin intrusive investigation . . . . . March 19

- Team training on site
- Table top exercise to address contingencies
- Pre-operations activities

Investigation period (6 weeks). . . . . March 19 to April 26

Demobilization complete. . . . . May 10

Begin restoration. . . . . May 11

(All dates beginning in March are tentative. Exact dates will be announced on the Information Line.)

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Homepage: http://www.nab.usace.army.mil/ environmental/springvalley.htm

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