

U.S. naval base waits for Cheney to make decision

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon is likely to recommend a reserve fleet be stationed at Naval Station Ingleside, instead of the battle group and 4,700 sailors originally envisioned for the South Texas homeport, an official said Wednesday.

Although a reserve facility would draw far fewer people to the Corpus Christi area than a strategic homeport, a decision on its role as part of a scaled-down Navy would end months of uncertainty in the community.

Brad Arvin, homeport coordinator for the Homeport Steering Council in Ingleside, said he expects a decision on the naval station when Defense Secretary Dick Cheney announces a list of options to be closed and realigned.

Cheney's recommendations are to be submitted to the independent, bipartisan Base Closure and Realignment Commission by April 15.

"We feel reasonably confident that the Defense Department will announce a mission for Naval Station Ingleside (at that time) and that mission will be primarily reserves," Arvin said.

But a congressional source said that while the Navy has publicly expressed its desire to convert the Corpus Christi area homeport into a reserve facility, it's still not clear whether Cheney will agree.

A second congressional source said he does not believe the Pentagon had reached a decision on the issue.

The Defense Department, local governments and the state of Texas have spent tens of millions of dollars preparing Ingleside for the arrival of the battleship USS Wisconsin, the aircraft carrier USS Lexington, eight other vessels, and 11,000 new people.

The strategic homeport was conceived during the Pentagon's plans to build toward a 600-ship Navy. But once the Navy began moving instead to 450-ship fleet, the future of Ingleside has been up in the air.

The Navy has already begun to decommission the USS Lexington, which would have brought 1,500 sailors to Ingleside, Arvin said. And President Bush's 1992 budget recommends mothballing the USS Wisconsin, which would have brought another 1,500 sailors to Texas.

The homeport is 85 percent complete, and the remaining \$22 million needed to finish construction has been frozen by Cheney since January 1990. Cheney must decide by April 16 whether to lift the moratorium on spending already appropriated military construction funds nationwide.

The Defense Department has spent \$120 million on the homeport, while the state of Texas and Nueces County put up \$25 million each to acquire the land and make improvements on the 500-acre site, Arvin said.

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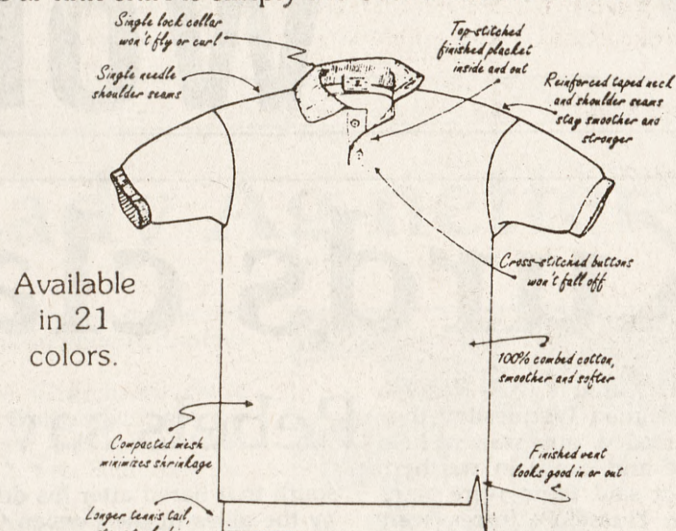
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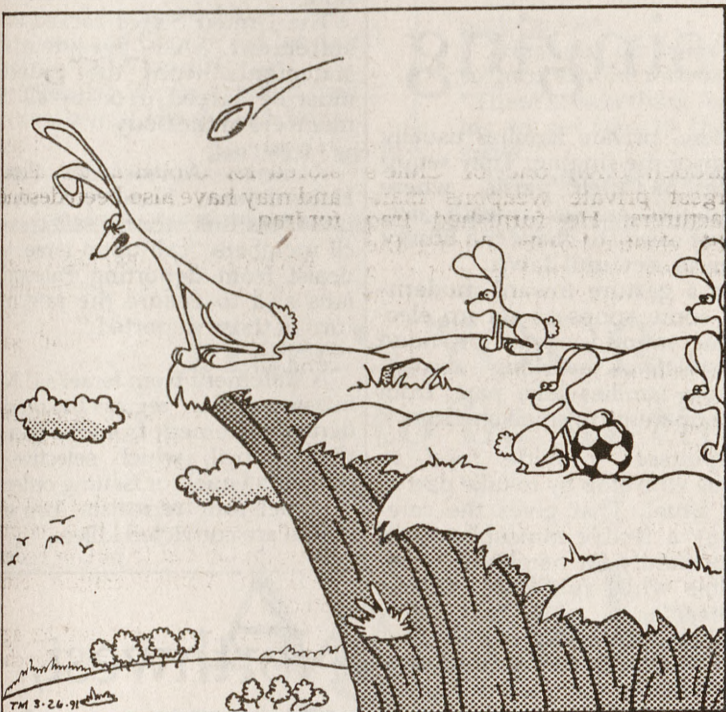
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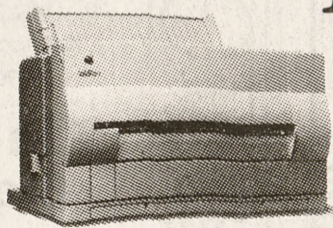
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