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Military style stays at schools complex

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After waiting 30 years, the 43-acre Prince William County Education administrative complex can now begin to look like a place built for the benefit of children and school administrators, not the remains of a former radar site used by the military. It can perhaps become a structure with large modern buildings, maybe have a fountain and an on-site convenience store.

But it won't.

The security fences, the cement buildings, and an old air traffic control tower — all remains of the **Manassas Air force base** — will remain even after the School Board is being released from a contract with the U.S. Government.

The School Board's priority is building new schools rather than trying to change the decor of the former World War II military base where its administration buildings are

standing, according Superintendent Ed Kelly. The faded World War II buildings on Joplin Road will stay.

The same towering cement warehouse used for storing military supplies will still be used to store school supplies. The same buildings that housed the soldiers who lived on the base years ago will still be the home of administrative offices.

The mobile trailers added to the base to compensate for the lack of building space will also stay. Rusted radio towers once used to communicate with airplane pilots will continue to rust and the eight-foot high atomic blast protection wall built in case of

enemy bombing will also remain in front of the warehouse.

School officials don't have any plans to build anything or tear anything down. But now they will enjoy the freedom of having that option, said Kelly.

The newfound freedom comes from the release of a 30-year contract between the Prince William County School Board and the U.S. Government. Under the contract, the title to the Manassas Air Force Station belonged to the government.

In spring 1967, the Prince William County School Board applied for ownership of the title to the Manassas Air Force Station. On April 22 of that year, the government agreed to a contract ... with a catch.

It said that for the next 30 years, the complex was to be used solely for educational purposes. If the School Board started using any part of the property for something other than education, the property would revert back to the government.

Since then, the School Board has remodeled the inside of the 60-year-old buildings, including establishing a special-education facility and constructing an entirely new administration building, which clearly doesn't match the architectural design of the other buildings.

But for the time being, said Kelly, that will be the only new building in the complex. He said more important issues had to be addressed.

"We need to use our money

to build schools, not administration buildings," he said.

Throughout the years, said George Pincince, director of Planning and Real Estate, the Department of Education conducted periodic monitoring checks to ensure the School Board was complying with the contract.

The School Board stayed within its limitation and abided by all the government's restrictions of the land. On April 22, they were released from the contract. The transfer of the deed will be celebrated Sept. 14 at C.D. Hylton High School with the Department of Education giving the School Board a "Release on Expiration of Restrictions."

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