

Post-WWII Military Support

The Depot stored munitions and supplies and supported war efforts during the Cold War (1947–1991), Korean Conflict (1950–1953), Vietnam War (1955–1975), Grenada Conflict (October 25–29, 1983), and Panama Conflict (December 1989–January 1990). Depot employees assisted during the Desert Storm (1990–1991) conflict by shipping more than 19,371 tons of ammunition to the Middle East; they sent 10,000 tons of conventional ammunition during the first 18 days alone.

The Depot's mission changed in 1962 when the military began storing only chemical agents on the site, eventually storing 12% of the country's stockpile of chemical nerve agents Sarin (GB) and VX, and the blister agent mustard (HD). These were stored primarily in the K and I Blocks.



"Grandpa" was the oldest mustard chemical agent container at the UMCD. The container was filled in 1941 and destroyed in 2011. Courtesy of the U.S. Army.

The 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention, a multilateral treaty from the United Nations, banned chemical weapons and required their destruction.



Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility was built for the sole purpose of destroying chemical agents at the UMCD. Courtesy of the U.S. Army.

Base Realignment and Closure

In 1988, military officials added the UMCD to the federal Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) list and realigned the installation's mission to store chemical agent munitions. Conventional munitions were disposed of or shipped to other storage depots. In 2005, the military identified the installation for closure once workers destroyed the chemical agents. In compliance with international treaty obligations, the Army constructed a temporary incinerator complex and destroyed chemical agents from 2004 until 2011. On August 1, 2012, the UMCD officially closed.

In 2017, the Army transferred 7,500 acres to the Oregon Army National Guard: it became the Raymond F. Rees Training Center. Of the 9,539.45 acres transferring to the CDA, 6,641.06 acres are for Habitat and Wildlife refuge, and 2,898.39 for industrial, agricultural, and right-of-way use. Through an agreement between the CDA and the Tribes, 4,019 acres of this land were returned to the Tribes.



Pronghorn were introduced to UMCD in 1969 as a nursery population. By 1986, the herd was over 350. Pronghorn were longtime residents of the UMCD and even featured on the facility's logo. U.S. Fish & Wildlife relocated the Pronghorn after the Depot closed in 2012. Courtesy of the U.S. Army.

This educational material fulfills part of a Programmatic Agreement to meet the historic property mitigation requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act regarding the closure and transfer of the UMCD.



An aerial view of the UMCD under construction. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

History of the Umatilla Chemical Depot (UMCD) 1941-2012

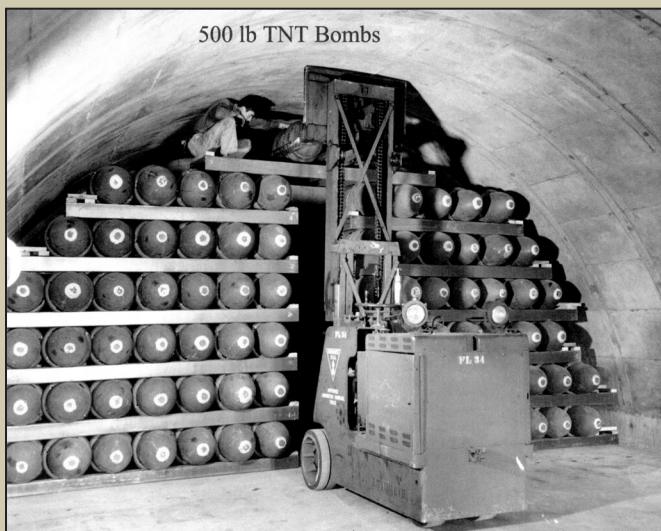


An aerial view of the UMCD, circa 2008. Courtesy of Sam M. Beebe, "Umatilla Chemical Depot," Ecotrust, 2008 Creative Commons Attribution 2.0.

Did you know?

The Umatilla Chemical Depot, originally named the Umatilla Army Ordnance Depot, was a military storage facility where the Army kept supplies, ammunition, rockets, bombs, and, later, chemical agents.

Overseas wars in the 1930s prompted Congress to authorize the construction of ammunition storage facilities throughout the United States. Of the first to be built, the Army strategically placed the UMCD nearly 250 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean in Umatilla County, Oregon; the location provided safety from coastal attacks while remaining accessible by vehicle, railway, and the Columbia River. The remote location also provided a buffer in case of accidental detonation of stored material.



Workers on the UMCD stored munitions inside reinforced concrete igloos. Courtesy of the U.S. Army.

Depot Construction

Congress selected the Umatilla site in November 1940, and construction began in January 1941. Workers built 1,002 storage igloos, 14 above-ground munition magazines, inert storage warehouses, shops, bunkers, administrative buildings, 135 miles of road, and 23 miles of railroad tracks.

Constructing the massive Depot drew thousands of eager workers to the area immediately after the Great Depression, including tribal members from the nearby Umatilla Indian Reservation. Many lived in a small town called Ordnanace near the Depot. It offered worker housing, a general store, a gas station, and a restaurant. The employment boom also spread to the

larger area—the nearby town of Hermiston's population swelled from 800 to more than 7,000 residents. The sudden influx created a housing shortage and strained the local supply chain. Workers found shelter in barns, attics, yards, and tents, while others slept in converted storage igloos, makeshift homes, or their cars.



Workers carefully loading a 500-pound bomb into the back of a truck. Courtesy of the U.S. Army.

World War II

During WWII, as many as 2,000 people worked at the Depot in shifts around the clock to pack, unpack, ship, and store munitions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As in many other places nationwide, women responded to wartime hardships by filling labor vacancies to support the war effort. By 1943, women accounted for up to 27% of the workforce at the UMCD, while their male counterparts voluntarily enlisted or found themselves drafted into the military.

The 1944 UMCD Igloo Accident

On March 21, 1944, at 9:29 p.m., 264 bombs, each weighing 500 lbs., detonated in the ammunition storage bunker Igloo 1014. The blast's concussion ripped doors from frames, shattered windows, and broke dishes in the Hermiston area, and residents felt the impact over 100 miles away in Lewiston, Idaho. When the explosion occurred, some thought it was an earthquake or that enemy planes had dropped bombs in the area.

An extensive Army investigation failed to determine the cause of the accident. However, many believe a bomb may have fallen on its tail, and investigators at the time speculated that one may have been defective. Fortunately, the engineers' igloo design worked flawlessly, and the explosion did not extend to other storage areas. Today, all that remains of Igloo 1014 is a crater. The Army invited the victims' remaining family members to a yearly public ceremony to honor those who perished until the Depot closed in 2012. The six employees lost that night are: Kenneth LeRoy Fraser, Lance Stultz, William Sanders, Harry Dwight Sever, Hiram Cook, and Alice Wolgamott.



The aftermath of the 1944 Igloo 1014 explosion. Courtesy of the U.S. Army.