

Amazon drone crashed twice in Pendleton in 2021

Not the first drone accident at UAS range

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Package delivery drones being tested at the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range crashed a couple of times last year, but the city of Pendleton is remaining quiet about the details surrounding the incidents.

Business Insider obtained reports from the Federal Aviation Administration that documented crashes on the Pendleton range in May and June of 2021. In the latter instance, the unmanned vehicle fell 160 feet, its battery catching fire after hitting the ground. “Several acres of wheat stubble field were soon

on fire,” the report states, according to Business Insider.

The May crash involved Amazon’s MK27 drone falling to the ground after a propeller failure.

An Amazon spokesperson told Business Insider that no one was hurt in either incident.

“We follow thorough procedures on how flight tests are conducted and how we respond to any incident,” the spokesperson said in a statement. “In this instance, we carried out a test with the utmost caution, as is normal in the aviation industry. No employee or community member was at risk and the team followed all appropriate safety procedures and reporting requirements.”

In a Friday, March 25, interview, Pendleton Range Manager Darryl Abling confirmed the crashes but said he could provide no other details about the

incidents. Abling said it’s against the drone range’s policy to discuss crashes and other incidents. Since the range’s customers are the groups that witness the crashes, Abling said he would be speculating if he commented on them.



East Oregonian, File

A Pendleton UAS Range logo adorns the door of the range’s Mission Control and Innovation Center in Pendleton on Wednesday, March 17, 2021.

range tracks all operations, including crashes, but he declined to disclose them since they aren’t public record.

At the urging of the city of Pendleton, the Oregon Legislature passed a law that allows Oregon UAS ranges from disclosing any records that might cause a “competitive disadvantage”

for the testing facilities. Pendleton is given wide discretion over what a disadvantage entails.

Speaking more broadly, Abling said range customers usually are required to “stand down” after a crash, keeping their drones grounded until they can determine the root cause of the crash and fix the issue.

This isn’t the first time a drone has crashed at the Pendleton range. In 2018, a drone belonging to defense contractor PAE crashed in a wheat field and also caused a fire. No one was hurt in the incident.

Abling said test ranges exist so companies can test out their technologies in a safe environment, and crashes are occasionally a part of the process. As drone operations continue to shoot up across the U.S., Abling said more crashes are a natural effect.

“There’s always going to be a risk in aviation,” he said.

Amazon is testing in Pendleton as a part of its Prime Air program, which aims to use drones to deliver products ordered on their website. Amazon joins Verizon and other large companies that are testing out unmanned vehicles for commercial purposes.

But not all companies follow through with products that go to market. PAE was one of the drone range’s most prominent customers in its early years, but the Virginia-based company pulled up its stakes in 2020 and sold its assets to a smaller company.

Amazon itself is facing questions over the future of its drone program. Business Insider reported Amazon Prime Air has struggled since launching in 2013 and has yet to complete a commercial delivery.

Pendleton World War II guardhouses are under threat

Airport commission again questions what to do with 80-year-old structures

By **JOHN TILLMAN**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The elements, construction traffic and neglect threaten two guardhouses dating back to World War II at what was then the Pendleton Field Army Air Base.

They’ve gone largely unmaintained for decades at Airport Road. What to do with them has become a more urgent issue with construction of the Radisson Hotel on a portion of the nearby Eastern Oregon Regional Airport parking lot. Opinions differ in Pendleton as to their fate. Commercial banker Mike Short served on the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport Commission until last year. He said, “I’ve heard gossip that some people would just like to eradicate the guardhouses. There might be more traffic now, with the hotel.”

Retired Army aviator Col. Tim Kelly, board member of the Pendleton Air Museum, said the guardhouses need to be protected until they can be restored.

“They’re in dilapidated condition, almost falling down,” he said. “The airport commission has talked about fixing them up for years, but nothing has been done. The chain-link fence surrounding the hotel project is leaning on one. Elvis’s (Bar & Grill) has stored things in one of them.”

Another Pendleton resident concerned for the historic structures is Kate Dimon, chair of the Pendleton Urban Renewal Grants Committee and vice chair of the Historic Preservation Landmarks Commission.

“A long lorry could hit them,” the Irish native said. Her solution is to move the guardhouses to the west end of the airport, near the National Guard’s B-25 bomber.

“It would be brilliant,” she said. “The vacant space next to the plane is a shared government and city owned property, so that is a possibility. The gates are in Walla Walla. We could probably get them back. My husband’s family has been in this community since the 1870s, so

Pendleton’s history holds a place in our family.”

Kelly said he considers moving the guardhouses to be more trouble than they are worth.

“When we were building the new (National Guard) facility, I asked if they would move them down to our location,” he said. “Of course they said it couldn’t be done because of their historic value. What we ended up with at the facility is a poor replica of one of the guardhouses.”

Kelly said he thinks they should stay where they are but with a small park or viewing area around them.

“Besides, they’ve been there over 80 years and haven’t been hit by a semitruck yet,” he said.

Army veteran and military vehicle collector Anthony Bowman, Pendleton, also favors leaving the gatehouses in place, but adding a little park with benches. To solve the traffic issue, he suggested an alternative.

“Just slightly reroute Airport Road, to a smooth curve instead of the hard left turn past the gatehouses now,” he said.

Kelly said if the city spent \$2 million to resurface the runways, “there should be room in the budget for a little historical restoration.”

Other suggested sources of funding include donations from Radisson, the National Guard and military and commercial users of the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range.

Airport Commission Chair Jeff Guenther, owner of Web’s Rod and Gun, said he expects the issue of what to do about the guardhouses to come up at the commission’s April meeting.

“We may form an opinion and pass it onto the city council for action,” he said. “I value the history of that airport, but we haven’t formally discussed it. I’ve heard some behind-the-scenes talk.”

His fellow commissioner, Pendleton High School Assistant Principal Curt Thompson, said this issue comes up every few years. He said he is in favor of restoring the guardhouses where they are.

The April 20 commission meeting will come just days after the 80th anniversary of the Doolittle Raid, whose volunteers passed through those gates in 1941.

Celebrating the Haines Stampede

By **LISA BRITTON**
Baker City Herald

HAINES — It all started with an outhouse.

In 2019, volunteers with the Haines Stampede Rodeo Association were cleaning up the rodeo grounds and decided the old outhouse, which once stood near the railroad depot, needed to go.

“We didn’t want to destroy it,” said Bill Taylor, who helps put on the annual rodeo.

The 1880s depot — and its outhouse — originally sat on the west side of the railroad tracks near Third Street in Haines. In 1963, the depot was relocated several blocks to the east, next to the Eastern Oregon Museum at 610 Third St., and the two-seat outhouse went south to the rodeo grounds.

Rather than tear apart the wooden structure, Taylor contacted Mary Jane Guyer, who is on the board for the Eastern Oregon Museum, to see if the museum wanted the outhouse.

Guyer said yes, and on May 1, 2021, the two historic structures were together again.

But that was just the start.

Guyer found out that the Stampede has years of records and artifacts from its history, which dates to 1915.

“She said it’d be neat if you moved that stuff to the museum,” Taylor said.

That comment sparked the idea to create a dedicated exhibit at the museum for the Haines Stampede and Haines Fourth of July celebration.

“We thought it’d be good to have it all together,” Taylor said.

The new display will be located inside the carriage wing of the museum.

Volunteers started painting the space on Friday, March 18, and the intent is to have the exhibit somewhat finished by Memorial Day weekend, when the museum opens for the season.

“It’s going to be a work in progress,” Taylor said.

And he hopes it grows.

He encourages anyone with memorabilia from past rodeos to contact him and see if it would fit in the new exhibit.

“A guy who won a buckle, or has pictures —



Baker City Herald, File

Bareback rider Austin Williams hangs on for a wild ride during the Haines Stampede rodeo in July 2016.

we’d like to see it and see if it’ll work in our display,” Taylor said.

He said they are on the trail of a 1923 trophy saddle that somehow ended up in Pennsylvania. “We’re actively trying to find that saddle,” he said.

The museum already has a couple Stampede ribbons — dated 1917 and 1923 — preserved inside a box made from an original window from the Muddy Creek School.

“If people have those, we can protect them,” Guyer said of the ribbons. “If there’s something historical, or documents, please make sure you check.”

Stampede history

The Stampede’s collection includes photos of rodeos from 1915 and 1916 — although those events weren’t quite like today’s two-day rodeo held every year on July 3 and 4.

“It was just fun to get together on a Saturday afternoon,” Taylor said of those first rodeos in Haines.

In 1922, the rodeo moved to the grounds, on the east side of Highway 30 at the south end of Haines, where the event still takes place.

“As much as we can figure, there were breaks during the war years,” Taylor said. “And it started up again after

World War II.”

Taylor, who grew up in Fossil, remembers coming to the Haines rodeo in the 1960s.

“It was one of the better rodeos in the state. It still is,” he said.

The rodeo continued in that location until 1985, when the event moved to the Slash D arena for two years.

The rodeo was canceled for three years until volunteers revived the July tradition.

“We started the rodeo again in 1991. We actually purchased the land,” Taylor said. “We haven’t missed a year since.”

These days, the rodeo draws an average of 375 participants from Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Nevada.

Colleen Taylor said the rodeo pays out more than \$40,000 in prize money, which all comes from entry fees.

Operating costs and improvements to the rodeo grounds are funded by the demolition derby, which is held every August (this year’s event is Aug. 13).

A new addition to the grounds this year is an elevated seating area, next to the grandstand, that is covered and accessible for those with mobility limitations.

For information about the Haines Stampede, or to buy tickets to the rodeo, visit www.hainesstampede.com.

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