

WWII:

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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 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 Pendleton Urban Renewal Grants Committee and vice chair of the Historic Preservation Landmarks Commission.

"A long lorry could hit



Tim Kelly/Contributed Photo

The construction site of the Radisson Hotel on March 21, 2022, abuts the World War II guardhouses at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport, Pendleton. Some are again calling for the preservation of the historic structures.

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)



Tim Kelly/Contributed Photo

Fencing from the construction site of the Radisson Hotel encroaches March 21, 2022, on one of the World War II guardhouses at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport, Pendleton.

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 view-

ing area around them.

"Besides, they've been there over 80 years and haven't been hit by a semi truck yet," he said.

Army veteran and military vehicle collector Anthony Bowman, Pendleton, also favors leaving the guardhouses 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 Test 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 was in favor of restoring them in place.

The April 5 commission meeting will come 13 days before the 80th anniversary of the Doolittle Raid, whose volunteers passed through those gates in 1941.

Rescue:

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Help arrives

Midmorning July 3, Postma heard voices above him. His voice was hoarse from yelling back and forth to Watson, but he grabbed a stick and banged it loudly on the ground to attract attention. About half an hour later, Postma's father Adam Otteson appeared along with Carter, who had decided to return despite his injuries because of worry about his friends. Otteson rushed to the site after learning about the fall. Postma couldn't see Watson from where he lay, but he and Carter soon learned their friend was gone.

"It was pretty terrible," Postma said.

Paramedics reached the spot and attended to Carter's and Postma's injuries. A U.S. Forest Service fire crew from Ukiah dug trail to the bottom and created a helicopter landing zone. Another team devised a system of ropes in case a helicopter rescue wasn't possible. A National Guard Black Hawk hoisted the two men from the canyon bottom and flew them to St. Charles Medical Center, Bend.

Saying goodbye

Postma spent almost two weeks in the hospital while Carter was released to heal at home. Holli Hill postponed her son's memorial service several weeks until both friends could attend.

On that day, three busloads of soldiers from Watson's National Guard unit in the Willamette Valley arrived in their dress blues, bringing with them a Howitzer with the name Cody imprinted on the barrel. Postma, a helicopter mechanic with the aviation unit in Pendleton, said members of his unit also attended. Many had gotten to know Watson, who was planning on joining the unit after flight school.

Those who knew Watson can't quite believe he is gone.

"Cody was an exceptional young man," said Sharon Gaines, his grandmother. "Truly. He was our cornerstone."

It's been a rough year for the family. Holli's husband Kyle Hill died in September 2020. The day of Cody's accident was Holli and Kyle's first wedding anniversary since Kyle's death.

"It was a beautiful hot summer day," she said. "We were supposed to be camping in the mountains. All three of those boys were supposed to be going to my



Sharon Gaines/Contributed Photo

Cody Watson sports a sharpshooter medal he won in March 2020, while deployed in Qatar.

camp for the weekend."

Sharon's husband Gene died this fall. As a boy, Cody and his grandfather spent a lot of time tromping around in the woods together, Sharon said. "I'm sure they're in a duck blind somewhere in Heaven telling stories."

Gratitude to responders

Gaines, an insurance agent and member of the Blue Mountain Insurance Professionals, which recently donated \$5,000 to Umatilla County Search and Rescue, thanked the people who responded to the fall.

"What most people don't understand is that these people are volunteering their time to put themselves

in harm's way to help our fellow citizens when they're in a bad situation," she said. "It's a huge county that goes from the desert to the mountains and everywhere in between."

Carter and Postma also expressed gratitude to first responders. "Search and rescue did a really great job," Carter said. "They worked as a team. It took a while for them to get down there, but that's because of how hairy it was. They assisted us all the way through."

"It was very challenging," said SAR Supervisor Dwight Johnson, who organized much of the rescue operation. "It was a narrow area, very hazardous."

Not being able to rescue

Watson still bothers Johnson even though he knows responders did all they could.

"It wasn't the outcome I wanted," he said.

Carter still grapples with guilt about not getting to the pickup faster despite his injuries and lost glasses. Gaines rejected that notion.

"The first time he saw me (after the fall), he said, 'I'm sorry I failed,' "Gaines said. "He didn't fail in any way. He was heroic."

Postma has returned to work and recently started running again. But even as his body heals, his mind often strays to Watson.

"Nothing will ever replace him," he said. "Part of Kyler and I died up there with him. That's just how it'll always be."

Omicron:

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But the loosened restrictions also came as the BA.2 "subvariant" arrived in Oregon. Beginning last week, OHA has started tracking BA.2 cases, which have been small but rising. Analysis of waste water around the state has shown traces of BA.2.

Nearly all states have been showing a rapid decline in cases. The BA.2 infections are seen as the main reason nine states are now showing a reversal in the trend.

BA.2 has spread rapidly in Asia and Europe. Twice as contagious as its already superspreading cousin BA.1, the BA.2 virus has caused a tsunami of new cases in China, which is reporting its highest infection rate of the 29-month pandemic, which began in Wuhan at the end of December 2019.

The World Health Organization reported 18 European countries are seeing a rise in new cases.

The WHO said March 25 that BA.2 was able to spread because of what it called premature removal of mask and other social distancing rules.

But the mixed messaging from medical and political sources continues. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has announced the state of emergency that's been in place since March 2020 will end on April 1.

New York ended its vaccine mandate for athletes and performers. Los Angeles

schools have ended masking. The U.S. Capitol will reopen for public tours this week. Hawaii was the last state to end indoor masking mandates earlier this month. The rate of people getting a first shot of vaccine has dropped off since early in the year.

While President Joe Biden continues to ask Congress for an increase in COVID-19 aid, the White House Easter Egg Roll is on for the first time since 2019.

All omicron variants so far have proven to be significantly more contagious than previous COVID-19 spikes, with the latest OHA statistics showing 61.9% of new infections were in unvaccinated people, while 37.7% were vaccine "breakthrough cases." Of those, 52.7% were fully vaccinated and boosted.

Most federal, state and local political leaders across the country have said they won't impose new restrictions unless a more virulent variant appears. In the United States, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are considering a request from vaccine-makers Pfizer and Moderna to approve a second booster shot for either the elderly or all adults. The shots have already been approved for immuno-compromised people and some foreign nations, including Israel, are offering the fourth shot to the general public.

A federal advisory panel is meeting April 6 to discuss vaccination policy, but action could come earlier.

Drone:

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leton, 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 packages to customers who order products on their website. Amazon joins Verizon and other large companies who 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.