

Boom:

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“We’re going to preserve the historic district,” Farmer said. “The exterior of the old HQ building will be maintained, but the interior will be thoroughly modernized.”

Regional training institute, more

Camp Umatilla hosts an Army National Guard training institute capable of providing individual and group schooling for infantry units up to battalion size — 300-800 soldiers. The site contains a weapons firing range and spaces for small maneuvers and tracked vehicle driver training. Its infrastructure supports weekend and annual drill periods while simultaneously hosting regional training institute classes.

Every state has an RTI, but Camp Umatilla’s center is one of only two infantry schools west of the Mississippi capable of housing and feeding 120 soldiers at a time. Class cycles vary in duration, from five-day tactical certification courses to 19-day advanced leadership courses, which take place monthly throughout the year.

Oregon Training Command and National Guard units use the regional training institute facilities during non-class times to fulfill weekend and annual training missions. Tactical skills trained include weapons qualifications, land navigation and wheeled and tracked vehicle driving.

A new, specially designed RTI was built in 2020, but its dedication ceremony was not held due to the pandemic, Gronewold said. The continental U.S. has only nine infantry RTIs. The rest are devoted to schools for different combat and supporting arms.

“The school is state of the art,” he said. “Units from all over the West come here to train here. The only comparable facility is in Mississippi. Active Army and Reserve infantry, as well as Guard cycle through here.”

A new, \$12 million heavy machine gun firing range on the Navy’s nearby Boardman bombing reservation is nearing completion.



An Abrams tank and an armored recovery vehicle bask in the sun Wednesday, July 27, 2022, at Camp Umatilla near Hermiston.

“Negotiations with the Navy started in 2002,” Farmer explained, “but a tentative agreement wasn’t reached until 2012. Environmental impact statements and COVID slowed us down, but now in 2022, it’s finally finished.”

A military and civilian unmanned aerial vehicle flight test facility is coming to the Navy bombing range this year as well.

The Department of Defense maintains 74 STARBASE Academies at Active, Reserve and Guard armed forces bases in every state and Puerto Rico. The military used them to encourage fourth to seventh graders to study science, technology, engineering and math. Oregon has four, including at Camp Umatilla.

“Kids have so much fun that they don’t notice they’re learning STEM disciplines,” Farmer said. “We’re happy to give back to local communities which support us so much.”

STARBASE Umatilla conducts two five-day sessions each summer, at which students build and program BattleBots to fight each other, OMD Public Affairs Officer Lt. Col. Stephen Bomar said.

History of the site

The installation began life as the U.S. Army’s Umatilla Depot in 1941, before America entered World War II. Its mission was to store and maintain a variety of military items, from blankets to ammunition.

The depot took on its chemical weapons role in 1962, storing 12% of the nation’s stockpile. Eight other depots held the rest. Chemical weapons stored there consisted of

live munitions and containers, each holding 1 short ton of GB or VX organophosphate nerve agents or HD sulfur mustard blister vesicant. From 1990 to 1994, the facility reorganized to prepare for eventual closure, shipping all conventional ammunition and supplies to other installations.

The Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility was designed for the destruction of the weapons at the depot. It was completed in 2001. The Army began weapons disposal on Sept. 8, 2004, and completed it on Oct. 25, 2011.

According to the U.S. Army Chemical Materials Activity, the facility destroyed 220,604 munitions and containers containing 3,717 short tons of GB, VX and HD via high-temperature incineration, representing 100% of the base’s stockpile.

Dismantling of the chemical disposal facility began in August 2013, and the base was expected to be transferred for state and private use by early 2015. The Columbia Development Authority, the local organization redeveloping the depot, pushed back the time-



Maj. Tim Merritt, left, and Lt. Col. Alan Gronewold, right, on Wednesday, July 27, 2022, at Camp Umatilla, explain the training center at the military facility near Hermiston.

line, first to 2016 and then to 2017 and into 2018, due to complications during cleanup. After decommissioning and transfer of land, about 7,400 acres of the depot went to the Oregon Military Department for a training facility.

Some 5,600 acres were transferred to the national wildlife refuge system and around 4,000 to industrial, agricultural and right of way development. A transportation package passed by the Legislature in 2017 set aside money for the Columbia Develop-

ment Authority to improve access from Interstate 82.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation also is a stakeholder in former depot lands. Its 20,000 acres covered ancestral Umatilla tribal hunting and gathering grounds, including religiously-significant Coyote Coulee. CTUIR Economic Development Director Bill Tovey told Oregon Public Broadcasting in 2019 he was eager to see the land returned to the tribes so they can begin rehabilitating it.

Safety:

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off of safety,” Headings said. “Our goal is to make sure that Pendleton School District is up to speed on safety.”

Mulvihill said he is hopeful the summit will strengthen the relationship between school districts and their local law enforcement agencies. As for school safety, Mulvihill made clear his goals for the summit.

“I hope the districts are going out into this school year with confidence that they have put in the time to make sure everything is secure and safe.”

— East Oregonian news intern Antonio Arredondo contributed to the article.

MORE INFORMATION

The summit will be closed to the public, but InterMountain Education Service District Superintendent Mark Mulvihill encouraged community members to look to their local law enforcement and media outlets for more information about the outcome of the event.

For more information about the summit, email Mulvihill at mark.mulvihill@imesd.k12.or.us. To learn about standardized protocol terminology, visit www.iloveuguy.org. To learn how to report school safety threats, visit www.safeoregon.com.



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