

# A Town Called "Deseret"

By Ms. Becki Bryant

It was the topography of Rush Valley in Tooele County, Utah, that grabbed the attention of the U.S. Army back in the early 1940s. However, the Army wasn't drawn by the beauty of the area but, rather, its remote location, dry conditions, and geographic location (between the Oquirrh Mountains to the east and the Onaqui Mountains to the west). According to the Army, this was the perfect place to store a portion of the Nation's chemical munitions stockpile. So, with plenty of fanfare, an inauguration ceremony for the new Deseret Chemical Warfare Depot (DCWD) was held there on 11 July 1943.

The DCWD prospered as a U.S. Army stockpile for rockets, bombs, mines, bulk containers, spray tanks, mortars, and projectiles that contained nerve agents (GB, GA, and VX) and blister agents (mustard and lewisite). Through the years, as the DCWD stockpile grew to 44 percent of the Nation's total chemical munitions stockpile, the on-site town of Deseret also grew. It became a thriving community known as "home" to the DCWD workers and their families. Everything that the residents needed—including a post office, bowling alley, nursery, chapel, school, health clinic, and commissary—was available in Deseret.

Mr. Richard Trujillo, who resided on base as a child and later worked at the depot until his retirement in 2004, remembers that "[Deseret] was a great community to live in." According to Trujillo (who is passionate about preserving Deseret through memories and old photos), the main road (now named Stark Road) was once known as First Avenue; the prisoner-of-war camp was known as "Tin Town" (due to the tin structures that housed World War II prisoners from November 1944 to July 1945); and the flagpole, which was constructed of scrap metal, was built by base employees.

Following World War II, Deseret continued to prosper—but not for long. Eventually, as roads and automobiles improved, the town began to dissipate until it was completely abandoned and ultimately torn down in the 1960s.



Chemical agent-filled containers at an outside storage area in 1969

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## Deseret Facts and Statistics

- Size: 19,362 acres
  - Number of buildings: 350
  - Number of igloos: 208
  - Area covered by roads: 680,065 square yards
  - Length of railroad tracks (unused): 42 miles
  - Number of employees:
    - Department of the Army civilians: 350
    - Military: 2
    - Contractors: 1,400
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By the 1970s, chemical weapons were aging and the Nation's leaders realized that continued storage posed perhaps the greatest risk of all. As a result, Congress directed the Army to develop safe, environmentally responsible methods of disposing of chemical agent-filled munitions.

To accomplish this hefty goal, the Army again relied on Tooele County, building the Chemical Agent Munitions Disposal System (CAMDS) within the boundaries of the depot. From 1979 until the early 1990s, the CAMDS location served as the primary test and development facility for the Nation's Chemical Weapons Elimination Program. While pioneering numerous chemical demilitarization processes and techniques at the CAMDS facility, the Army also destroyed more than 363,000 pounds of chemical agents and more than 40,000 munitions there.



Based on the many processes and techniques that were developed, the successes that were demonstrated, and the lessons that were learned at the CAMDS facility, plans were made to destroy the outspread arsenal of chemical munitions. To avoid transporting the aging munitions, the Army decided to destroy the chemical weapons at their individual stockpile locations in Anniston, Alabama; Edgewood, Maryland; Newport, Indiana; Pine Bluff, Arkansas; Tooele, Utah; Umatilla, Oregon; Johnson Atoll in the Pacific Ocean; Pueblo, Colorado; and Blue Grass, Kentucky.

Construction of the Tooele Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (TOCDF) at Deseret began in 1989. On 22 August 1996, TOCDF disposal operations started with the destruction of the first GB-filled M55 rocket. Today, the depot (now known as Deseret Chemical Depot [DCD]) and TOCDF continue to work together to destroy what was once the largest and most diverse stockpile of chemical weapons in the Nation. The years have brought numerous challenges, innovative solutions, and accomplishments. As a result, all GB- and VX-filled munitions have been destroyed (thus, reducing the risk to the environment and to the community by more than 99 percent) and mustard disposal efforts—which have been underway since August 2006—are nearly complete.

Two new facilities located within the DCD Area 10 storage yard are also being used to help eliminate the stockpile there. The small quantity of GA and lewisite that is stored in bulk containers is being destroyed by the Area 10 liquid incinerator, while a detonation chamber known as the Detonation of Ammunition in a Vacuum-Integrated Chamber (DAVINCH™) is supplementing plant efforts



Storage igloos at the TOCDF

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### Did You Know?

- DCD has had several names, including—
    - Deseret Chemical Warfare Depot (1942).
    - Western Chemical Center (1947).
    - Deseret Chemical Depot (1950).
    - Deseret Depot Activity (1955).
    - Tooele Army Depot South Area (1962).
    - Tooele Chemical Activity (1995).
    - Deseret Chemical Depot (1996–present).
  - There were originally 42 miles of railroad lines at the depot; approximately 32 miles of track are to be recycled.
  - There are a number of historical sites located at DCD:
    - **Johnson Cemetery.** This cemetery contains the remains of several settlers who homesteaded the area in the late 1800s. Thirteen grave plots have been identified; three are marked by headstones.
    - **World War II prisoner-of-war camp.** This camp, which operated from November 1944 to July 1945, was one of 12 locations in Utah where prisoners of war were housed. German and Italian prisoners were held at this particular camp. The site has since been demolished.
    - **Pioneer homesteads.** There are two historical homesteads located on depot property—the Stookey homestead and the Johnson homestead.
  - A 1945 railroad car, which was originally part of a train used to transport wounded Soldiers, was brought to the CAMDS facility in the early 1970s where it was used to house backup generators for more than two decades before being donated to the Utah State Railroad Museum in 2008.
  - Rainbow Reservoir, which is located on DCD, is open to the public and annually stocked with fish.
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to eliminate the remaining 300-plus overpacked, mustard-filled, 4.2-inch mortars and 155-millimeter projectiles.

With the startup of these two new facilities, DCD and TOCDF are on pace to complete disposal operations in time to meet a 2012 international treaty deadline. Most importantly, the deadline will be met without compromising safety for production, making Tooele County—and the world—a much safer place to live.

“The work accomplished by the combined TOCDF and DCD workforce has made the world a safer place,” says Colonel Mark B. Pomeroy, commander of DCD. “Complete stockpile elimination will be a tremendous capstone for the rich history of DCD.”



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