

The End of an Era...

Johnston Island Accomplishes Its Mission

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April 11, 2001, was a red-letter day in the history of the Chemical Corps. After three decades of operation, the U.S. Army Chemical Activity Pacific (USACAP) was deactivated during a Chemical Surety Decertification ceremony on Johnston Island. This little spec of land is located 825 miles southwest of Hawaii.

USACAP was a unique facility in that it brought together soldiers, Air Force personnel, federal civilian employees, and private-sector contractors to perform an important mission mandated by the Chemical Warfare Treaty. During its operation, USACAP was required to safely store, secure, transport, and account for chemical weapons. The destruction of the last stockpiles of chemical munitions, such as the nerve agent VX on November 29, 2000, ended the mission for the island.

The storage of chemical weapons on the facility began in 1971 when Operation Red Hat brought tons of chemical munitions from Okinawa to Johnston Island. However, the destruction of these munitions began in 1990 when the chemical agent disposal system facility was completed. In the last decade, the facility has successfully destroyed more than 400,000 rockets, projectiles, bombs, mortar rounds, ton containers, and mines. During this process not a single serious incident occurred.

The facility destroyed more than 2,000 tons of chemical agents such as sarin, VC, and blister agents like HD. This destruction adds up to 7 percent of the total chemical-munitions stockpiles of the United States. The Johnston Island disposal facility was the first of its kind, and all the other nine sites use the information developed from this facility to build better and safer disposal facilities. During the elimination of such dangerous chemicals, the island was responsible for the safety of the Pacific area and the environmental stewardship of the area, which is alive with all sorts of marine and bird activity. This operation required individuals to be away from their families for up to a year.

During its three decades of work, Johnston Island set standards for safety and storage of very lethal chemical agents that will be difficult to improve upon. During that process, all operations were continuously monitored for safety. Environmental concerns and the information



Johnston Island is a designated wildlife refuge.

developed from this process were immediately shared with other facilities going online or already online. In fact, the expertise developed from USACAP has been shared and will be shared with any nation seeking to destroy its chemical-munitions stockpile.

Those who will live in the twenty-first century will not have to worry about the material stored on Johnston Island. It's gone and never will it be restored!

Although both an Air Force and Army facility, Johnston has continuously worked in cooperation with federal agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. With the plant in the process of closing, protection of the environment is a top priority at USACAP.

The final closure of the plant and the Army's facilities will take another 33 months. But when the work is completed, the dangerous work there will be over, and no damage to the delicate Pacific environment will have occurred.

USACAP personnel raised professionalism and dedication to duty to a new level. That no problems occurred can be directly attributed to the training and dedication of all USACAP personnel. More work needs to be done to rid the world of these dangerous chemicals; the superb work of USACAP is a good start. This facility will soon pass into history, but its work must never be forgotten.