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Unit 6 Extra Credit: De-Industrialization paper

The Savannah Army Depot



Savannah Army Depot, seven miles north of Savannah, IL

Nestled in Illinois' northwest corner along the scenic Mississippi River, there is an old mysterious place called the Savannah Army Depot. Once a clandestine national security stronghold during the twentieth century, it is now a potentially beautiful piece of property that, for the most part, is forbidden to the general public. Although ideas have floated about how to utilize this immense area—14 miles long and 3 miles wide, nothing has happened yet. Because the land is so contaminated with chemicals and explosives, it would take an incredible amount of time, patience, and money before the property would be deemed safe for public use.

Back in 1918, the Savannah Army Depot opened as a secure place to test cannons produced by the nearby Rock Island Arsenal (Weeks). The location was perfect—it was upstream from Rock Island so barges could deliver equipment. There was also a train line running straight to this base. World War II brought even more jobs to the depot and up to 7,195 people were employed. About 800 people might have even been “secretly employed . . . working on ‘black’ projects for US government” (Gerstung). This was one of the “largest army depots in the state” according to the National Toxic Land/Labor Conservation Service. It even housed the “atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan in WWII “ (Gerstung). Dangerous ammunition like mustard gas was also stored on the grounds (Klindenburg) as well as nuclear missiles

(NTLL). Nearby Mississippi River bluff caves allegedly had secret entrance points for tunnels (Weeks). It is rumored that the underground passages existed so the Soviet satellites would not be able to see workers covertly moving materials (Gerstung).

Eventually, the Cold War ended and the military work here dried up. By 1995, there was a massive rash of U.S. base closures and the Savannah Army Depot was on the list. The base completely closed to the public in 2000 (NTLL). Presently, the area is “. . . partially converted into a wildlife refuge and reserve but large sections of the base still remain off limits”. The majority of the old army buildings remain standing and are simply “padlocked” (Gerstung). Since 2000, “many buildings are in significant disrepair” with stacks of debris, peeling paint, and wildlife taking over. Original roads are overgrown. Deadly uncertainties also await. Some buildings are “so saturated with TNT [dynamite] that dropping a rock can set off a spark” (NTLL). A multitude of unexploded shells are still lodged throughout the ground (Weeks).

If this site could be ever possibly be cleaned up and restored, it would be an amazing destination. The property stretches along the scenic Mississippi River and is located far from busy cities and highways. Lots of ideas have been proposed—a gambling casino resort, an ethanol plant, and even a retirement community (Weeks). However, none of the projects can be developed because the Local Redevelopment Authority says, “. . .this huge piece of real-estate is mostly inhabitable for humans” (NTLL). The Environmental Protection Agency reports that to date, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife is responsible for 9,000 acres. Remaining industrial sections have been leased to the Local Redevelopment Authority so it can eventually be used for economic ventures. At present, there is no substantial economic developmental activity to report; the land is still not fit for public use because of the extensive amount of clean up needed (EPA). Even if this site was eventually cleaned up, how could it ever be guaranteed as a completely safe place? Because of the known contamination, it will always be a detrimental risk for public use.

http://photos.wikimapia.org/p/00/01/95/46/28_big.jpg





“Old Bomb Factory”, Savannah Army Depot
<https://americanbyways.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/stacks.jpg>



Savannah Army Depot grounds
 Photo credit: Jim Frazier
http://farm1.static.flickr.com/30/53592879_32c1c5c55e.jpg



“Warning Against Digging” post
<http://www.inhs.illinois.edu/files/9413/3890/4932/lostmound.jpg>

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