

PINE BLUFF ARSENAL CLEANUP

Nerve gas in Arkansas? Yes.

One of the lesser-known challenges facing the Corps in the 1980s was cleanup of a hazardous waste dump at Pine Bluff, Arkansas:

“Military construction in the late 1970s reflected the policies of President Jimmy Carter’s administration . . . emphasizing environmental projects, particularly the cleanup of hazardous waste sites. This emphasis has continued to affect Army operations well into the 1980s.

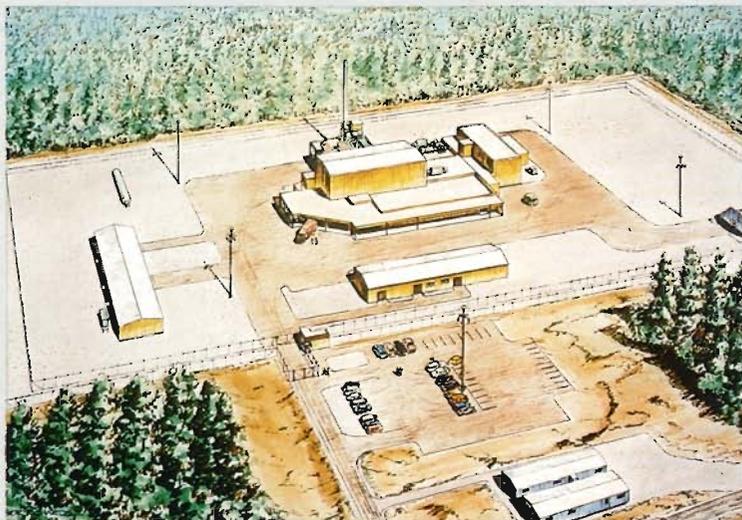
“Environmental experts began finding hazardous waste dumps — some of them now leaking — on military installations as well as on private lands. Many of these sites dated back to World War II, when they had not been considered dangerous.

“For example, at Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas, the Army Chemical Corps spent much of the early part of World War II trying to develop a nerve gas in large quantities. The production line, however,

first produced large amounts of dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, shortened to DDT. This substance, an insecticide later discovered to be highly toxic to humans and animals, was simply stored at the arsenal as waste matter. Eventually the Chemical Corps solved its manufacturing problems and began to produce nerve gas in lieu of DDT.

“In the meantime, Germans had developed successful nerve gas production facilities that yielded only small quantities of DDT. When German officials learned of the large amount of DDT stored at the arsenal, they mistakenly concluded that the United States had large stores of nerve gas as well. So, luckily for soldiers on both sides, they chose not to initiate its use in war.

“The Southwestern Division is still working with the Pine Bluff Arsenal to contain and neutralize such wastes after more than 40 years.”⁹



Among the most difficult problems of our age: disposal of hazardous wastes. Shown here: hazardous waste landfills and an artist’s conception of a B-Z disposal facility. Both are at Pine Bluff Arsenal, where the Tulsa District is responsible for disposal of hazardous wastes from World War II nerve gas and DDT.