

Site of WWII Naval Ammunition Depot

NAD

Hastings, Nebraska
East U.S. Highway 6

**Arming America's Navy
from the Nebraska prairie
during WWII.**



One of the nation's
most significant
naval landmarks
lies in the middle of
the Nebraska prairie.

In December 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor—and America was at war. And America's Navy needed munitions to fight in the Pacific and European theatres.

In July 1942, construction of the Naval Ammunition Depot (NAD) in Hastings began at a cost of \$45 million. The 2,000 building, 48,753-acre facility was commissioned just eight months later in February 1943. The first ammunition shipment was made on an auspicious date: July 4, 1943—Independence Day.

Why Hastings, Nebraska? Being smackdab in the middle of the nation made it impossible for any German or Japanese aircraft to reach because their planes simply didn't have that range. Being served by three major railroads enabled shipment to either coast in just two days. Add an abundant supply of underground water, cheap utilities and a stable workforce, and it's easy to see why the NAD in Hastings was the U.S. Navy's largest munitions plant from 1942-46.



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Adams County
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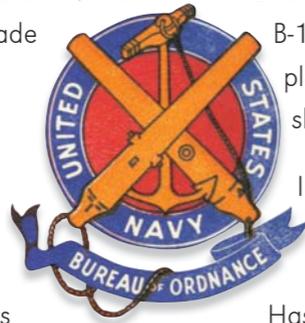


At one point in World War II, nearly 40% of the U.S. Navy's ordnance was produced in Hastings.

Bombs, rockets, torpedoes, mines, powder, small caliber ammunition, 40mm shells—even 16-inch projectiles for big gunships. They made it all at the U.S. Naval Ammunition Depot in Hastings, Nebraska.

Workers were paid 74¢ per hour for a 60-hour week—about \$45 per week, very competitive in those years. A large percentage of workers were women, since many men were off to war.

While the establishment of the NAD provided a much needed economic boost for a small Nebraska town recovering from the Depression, the facility wasn't without its share of controversy. The federal government condemned 232 properties, displacing 192 landowners through eminent domain, and offering "fair market value" in return. Many farmers didn't agree. But it was wartime. The rules were...well, different.



Housing was another challenge. In addition to 10,000 workers at the NAD, the area was also the site of an Army Air Corps B-17 bomber base in Harvard (15 miles east), and a munitions plant in Grand Island (30 miles north)—creating a housing shortage across the entire region.

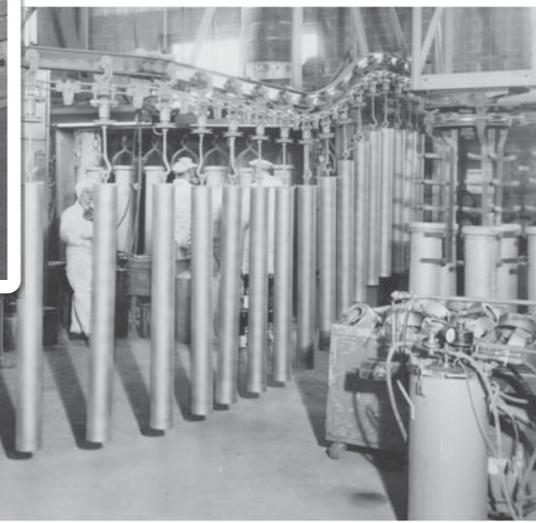
In just three years, the population of Hastings nearly doubled from 15,500 to some 25,000 with military personnel and the workforce attracted by this wartime opportunity. It changed the face of Hastings, literally. Several hundred workers and sailors were African-American, initially creating social tensions on both sides in this predominantly white community.

A tremendous explosion on September 15, 1944, killed nine and injured 53. Caused by human error during train loading, the blast was felt 100 miles away in Lincoln, shattered windows in Hastings, and collapsed a school room in Harvard. There were three other loss-of-life explosions during 1944 as well, claiming an additional 12 lives.

Following the end of World War II, the Navy began to deactivate the facility. But the outbreak of the Korean War reactivated the depot in 1950, though not to the extent of its role in WWII. Still, 200 buildings were added. The facility was used for ordnance manufacturing storage until June 1966, when the facility was officially decommissioned.



Today the former NAD facilities have found multiple uses including:



- ▶ The U.S. Department of Agriculture Roman L. Hruska Meat Animal Research Center (MARC)
- ▶ The campus of Central Community College-Hastings which was established in 1966
- ▶ An industrial park including manufacturing, warehousing, and agribusiness
- ▶ National Guard training
- ▶ Elks Country Club & golf course
- ▶ An auto racing track
- ▶ Hunting and recreation
- ▶ Leased land for farming and grazing

Black & white photos courtesy Adams County Historical Society Image Collection



What the heck are those "humps" out there?

One of the most recognizable characteristics of the former NAD are the miles of earthen mounds or "igloos", the bunkers used for explosives storage during the heyday of the NAD.

- ▶ There are 700 earthen/concrete bunkers on the southeast 35 square miles of the site and over 1,000 ammunition vaults and storage buildings along U.S. Highway 6.
- ▶ The bunkers were used primarily for munitions storage and were connected by road and rail.
- ▶ The dirt covering the concrete bunkers kept the inside temperature constant and provided additional mass for blast protection.
- ▶ The blast shield or "blow wall" in front of bunkers was designed to channel any explosion upward to reduce a possible chain reaction to other structures.
- ▶ Today, bunkers are being used for a variety of purposes—storage, pork production, even a recreational hunting facility!



NAD Tour Map

IMPORTANT! It is absolutely imperative that you stay on the route outlined on these maps and do not stray from it. Much of this land is owned by private landowners or the federal government—and trespassing may result in substantial fines or even arrest. Please enjoy your drive, but please stay on the route!



MUNITIONS PRODUCTION, STORAGE & TRANSPORT

This portion of the route takes you through the area of the NAD in which actual production of munitions took place. This area also was the site of storage and transport/load-out facilities.

Much of the grounds are now an industrial park housing a number of manufacturing, agribusiness, and warehousing/storage activities. The USDA Meat Animal Research Center is also located in this area and is a restricted area.

- 1 Inert Storage** Buildings used for storage of materials to make the munitions.
- 2 Projectile/Case Loading & Filling Plant** In this area, 40MM, 20MM and major projectiles (16-inch shells) were loaded.
- 3 Medium Caliber Ammunition Loading Plant**
- 4 Rocket Motor Loading Plant**
- 5 High Explosive Storage Bunkers** One of the most prominent features of the NAD. This heavily guarded area served as bulk storage for supplies and munitions. Railroad tracks ran to each bunker.
- 6 Covered Walkways** Constructed for the safety and comfort of employees as they moved from building to building.

- 7 Lunch & Locker** Residue from the "Yellow D" powder used in production coated workers' clothing, so they changed before and after work. Matches and lighters were prohibited on the grounds.
- 8 Army Reserve Center** Area of the grounds now used for reserve training.
- 9 Ammunition Storage**
- 10 Fuse & Detonator Storage**
- 11 Powder Sifting** Powder was sifted to the proper consistency for each type of munition.
- 12 Cast High Explosives Filling Plant** Bombs, mines and depth charges were assembled here.
- 13 Prairie Dog Town** You may catch a glimpse of these large rodents, which are protected by federal law from unauthorized eradication.
- 14 Transfer Depot** Similar to the one destroyed in the September 15, 1944 explosion. The site of the explosion lies in a restricted area.
- 15 Railroad Classification Yard & Dunnage Operation**

U.S. NAVAL AMMUNITION DEPOT

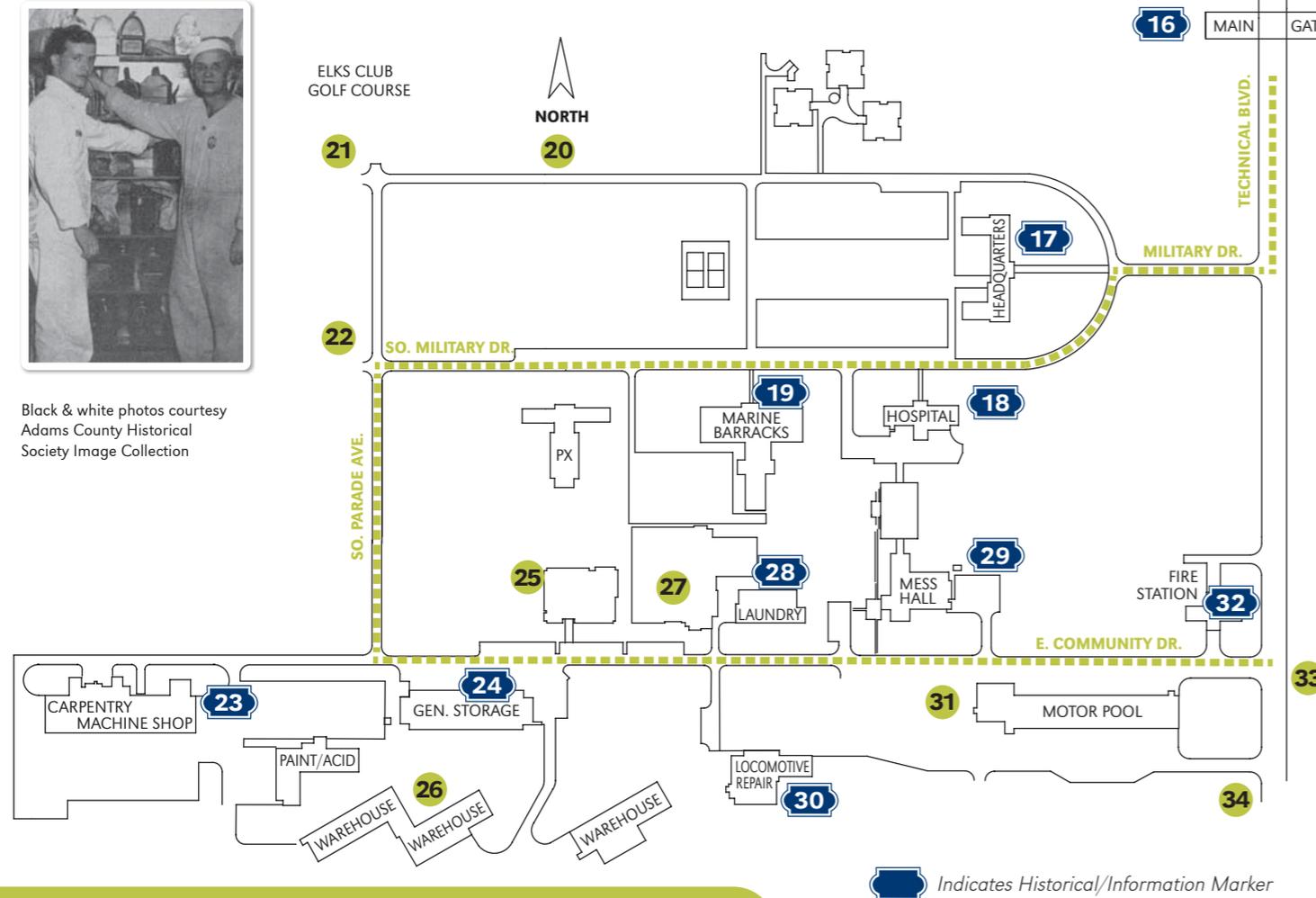
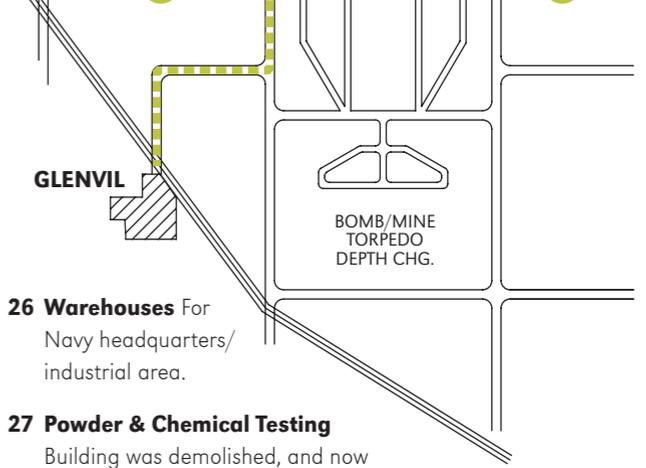




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NAD HEADQUARTERS AREA

Now Central Community College-Hastings Campus (new building names in parentheses), this portion of the route takes you through what was the headquarters area of the Naval Ammunition Depot. There are several NAD-related plaques throughout the grounds, indicated by a 



- 16 Former Main Gate/Guardhouse**
- 17 NAD Administration Building** Referred to as “Mainsides” in Navy terminology. Now serves as a residence hall (Clay) for Central Community College (CCC).
- 18 Navy Dispensary/Hospital** Now the CCC administration building (Adams).
- 19 Marine Barracks** Now houses CCC business programs (Platte).
- 20 Former site of homes for commanding officer and executive officer** Homes were auctioned and removed in the 1980s.
- 21 Former site of Officer’s Club.** One of the largest buildings on the grounds, it featured a swimming pool, lounge and restaurant—all manned by Navy personnel.
- 22 Former site of enlisted personnel housing** 32 homes were once located in this area.
- 23 Carpentry Shop/Machine Shop** Now used by CCC Construction/Machine Shop Technology instruction (Hamilton).
- 24 Warehouse** Once used to store supplies and materials, now used for CCC general education courses (Nuckolls).
- 25 Gausman Building** Newly constructed by CCC in 1977, this building is named for the college’s first president and houses dental-related programs. It is the only building on campus named for a person rather than a Nebraska county.

- 26 Warehouses** For Navy headquarters/ industrial area.
- 27 Powder & Chemical Testing** Building was demolished, and now is the site of the CCC Dawson student activities building.
- 28 Laundry Building** Employees’ clothing frequently became contaminated with powders and chemicals. Now the CCC Phelps building, housing printing and instructional support.
- 29 Navy Mess Hall/Cafeteria** Also prepared meals for 21 canteens in outlying area (Hall).
- 30 Locomotive Shop** New in the 1940s, locomotives were used to move rail cars over 207 miles of track within the NAD—and repairs were done here. Became the CCC Gosper building, housing diesel technology programs, but was demolished in 2010.
- 31 Motor Pool** Repair shop for NAD autos, jeeps, trucks and buses. Now the CCC Furnas building for automotive and auto body technology.
- 32 Fire Station/Communications Center** Now serves as CCC Sherman building.
- 33 Former site of NAD non-denominational church**
- 34 Former site of temporary barracks** for enlisted Navy personnel.

U.S. NAD HEADQUARTERS AREA

Maps and color photos courtesy Walt Miller NAD Collection



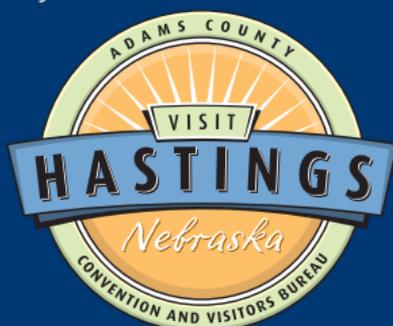
NAD

by the Numbers

At its peak production, the U.S. Naval Ammunition Depot in Hastings had:

- ▶ A military and civilian workforce of over 10,000 (August 1945)
- ▶ 207 miles of railroad track
- ▶ 2,207 buildings including administration, manufacturing, storage, maintenance, housing and shipping—including 65 factory buildings for loading and assembly of ordnance
- ▶ 57 miles of fencing
- ▶ 274 miles of roads
- ▶ 12 water wells, 88 miles of water main and 507 fire hydrants
- ▶ 67 miles of electrical lines and 17 miles of natural gas mains
- ▶ Two sewage treatment plants and 23 miles of sanitary mains
- ▶ A swimming pool, ice skating pond and officers club

Produced by



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