



**Jefferson Proving Ground Journey
at the Indiana Historical Society
Jefferson Proving Ground Heritage Partnership,
Journey Sponsor**

An Indiana Experience™

Jefferson Proving Ground Journey



Location of Jefferson Proving Ground, March 15, 2013

Jefferson Proving Ground (JPG), a former U.S. Army munitions testing facility in southeastern Indiana, operated from 1940 until 1995. Established on the eve of World War II, JPG live tested artillery ammunition, bombs, mines, and weapons for 53 years, resulting in local people referring to the nearby town of Madison as “Boomtown.” The 55,265-acre installation overlapped three counties: Jefferson, Jennings, and Ripley. It helped shape the region, having a huge impact on the economy and residents.

Destination Indiana

Jefferson Proving Ground Journey



COL. DEROSEY CARROLL CABELL JR.

**Lt. Col. Derosey Cabell,
Ca. 1941**

The U.S. Army selected this site in southeast Indiana due to its proximity to 95% of the munitions producing plants in the country, a favorable climate, good transportation services, and available land. Lt. Col. Derosey Cabell was assigned to build and operate the base. Its mission was to “Proof Test” all ammunition, from 20mm to 155mm guns. More than 2,000 people were forced from their ancestral homes, schools, and churches to make way for the facility.

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EJ_CHAMBERS_KEEP_OUT_SIGN

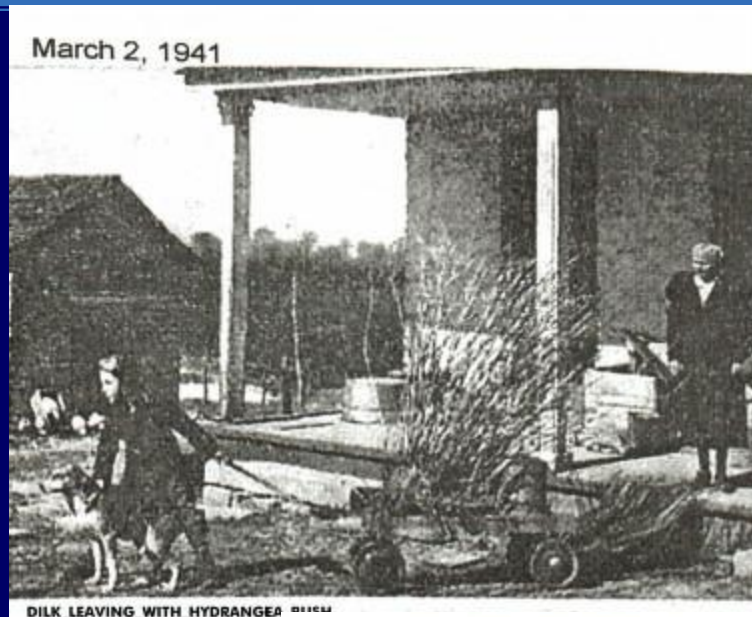


FENCE THROUGH BARN

**Keep Out Posted (l),
Fence Through Barn (r),
Ca. 1941**

In just 155 days, rural communities disappeared from the map, replaced by an ammunition testing ground. People were devastated by their losses but few complained; most felt it was their patriotic duty. Christmas 1940, the last one residents could spend in their homes, had a special meaning. The Farm Security agency oversaw land transactions to prevent speculation. As families left, the Army posted signs on the doors of the abandoned houses: Keep Out by Order of U.S. Army.

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Dilk Family Farm, Jefferson County, 1941 (l); 2005 (r)

In 1941, Hallie Dilk watched her son Floyd transfer one of her prized hydrangea bushes to a waiting moving truck. In 2005 her grandson, Charles Dilk, stood in the same spot, now at the edge of a depleted uranium impact field. The 137-acre Dilk family farm was located on the banks of Big Creek. Government agencies helped people find temporary homes and places for their livestock during the transition. Local newspapers listed detailed plans so that neighbors knew what happened to each other.

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Monroe Presbyterian Church and Sunday School Class, Ca. 1920



Monroe Presbyterian Church was founded in 1830, and the congregation erected this stone building in 1844. The final service was held there on February 16, 1941, and members accepted their fate with tearful regrets. Cemeteries were also relocated. Those by churches were easily identified and accessible for removal, but township and family cemeteries were more difficult to handle. The Jefferson Reinterment Association chose and purchased a relocation site for the 3,500 dead.

MONROE_TWP_PRESBYTERIAN_SUNDAY_SCHOOL

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Oakdale School and Class of Teacher Elzia Demaree, 1930

Some 20 schools had been built in the Proving Ground area from the 1820s to 1941. The first Oakdale School was built of hewn logs in the 1820s and accommodated 30 to 40 pupils. It was still a log schoolhouse in 1852 when the Monroe Township took it over as district school No. 5. The stone building was built in 1869 and served the final 21 students until the closing in February 1941. Today, Oakdale is the single surviving schoolhouse in the Proving Ground.

OAKDAL



OAKDALE ONE ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE 1929

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COMMANDER'S_RESIDENCE_HEADQUARTERS_AND_FIRING_LINE_TOP

Colonel's Residence, Military Housing, Headquarters Building, Ca. 1942

In January 1941 construction began for 120 buildings on the site, most factory-type structures. Bomb shelters and 64 new miles of roads were added to the area, as well as an airport to accommodate bombers and cargo planes. Miles of railroad track were laid to connect storage and loading yards. At the peak of activity in 1942 some 5,000 people were employed during construction work there, and at the time building JPG reflected the second largest construction project in Indiana.

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**8 Inch Howitzer being Loaded with
200 lb. Shell,
Ca. 1980**

Much more was involved in testing ammunition than simply “pulling the trigger.” A typical firing mission involved a test director, a crew chief, 4 gunners, 2 camera techs, 2 electrical techs, 3 downfield observers, 1 radar tech, and 1 range safety officer, for a total of 15 staff. Four to five test programs were completed on an average firing day. Until base closure was announced in December of 1988, the work force averaged 600 men and women.

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JPG Community Supports the Troops, Late 1990



At the outbreak of the First Gulf War, JPG's workload increased approximately 15%, as 321 lots of munitions were tested. Relatives of 35 employees were in military service at the time, and staff began a letter writing campaign and care package program to show the troops their appreciation. They even moved an M1 tank in front of the headquarters and as many employees climbed on board as could find space. A photo was taken and sent to each of the family members serving during the war.

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SHELL IN TREE ONE ON GROUND

Scattered Ordnance Debris On and Under the Land, 1995

Jefferson Proving Ground estimated that 23 million rounds had been fired there since 1941. Approximately 1.4 million of those items did not function and were considered duds. Ordnance items, including duds, are not normally recovered after they have been fired because of the extreme hazards. Another 6.9 million rounds were inert projectiles, many with live fuzes and spotting charges with explosive potential. Today, these rounds are still out there.

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D-ROAD BIG OAKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Autumn at Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge, 1995

In 1998, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began managing the wildlife resources of the Proving Ground. Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge was established in June 2000 as an “overlay” refuge through a 25-year real estate permit from the U.S. Army. As an overlay refuge, the Army retains ownership and the Fish and Wildlife Service manages the property. A safety buffer separates the area from an Indiana Air Guard bombing range.

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Louis Munier Visits His Birthplace, 2005

Louis Munier's Farm was in the hottest explosive area in JPG. After 55 years of shells impacting the old house, the photo shows all that remains. Land that was home to the Munier family for three generations has been developed as part of Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge. It contains the largest unfragmented forested block in southeastern Indiana and some of the largest grassland areas in the region. The refuge provides food and shelter for over 200 species of birds and 46 species of mammals.

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NATURE RECLAIMING LAND

Nature is Reclaiming the Land, 2012

In 1988, the testing mission began to transfer to Yuma Proving Ground in Arizona, a seven-year process. Fifty miles of eight-foot-tall chain link fence surrounds the property. Cleanup costs are estimated at over \$5 billion. The land and the community remain innocent victims of war. Nature is reclaiming the area, but the natural beauty masks the hazards that will remain forever.

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