

Those World War II Buildings Have To Go

Huntsville Center helping remove outdated wood structures at Fort Polk

By Debra Valine

World War II-era wood buildings used to be a quick, easy, inexpensive option for office space and Soldier housing on Army installations.

As the Army transitions to the new modular force, newer, more up-to-date buildings are needed and the old wood buildings are being torn down.

Fort Polk, La., has 340 of these World War II wood buildings.

The Installation Management Command contacted the U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville, to manage the demolition at Fort Polk. Huntsville Center is working with the installation; Fort Worth District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and Bhate Associates Inc. on the project.

A \$1.3 million contract awarded to Bhate Associates Inc. to remove 58 wood buildings – 294,148 square feet – is in progress. Demolition started May 4 with completion expected in August. Follow-on contracts will be awarded for the remaining 282 buildings.

“We’re making a dent in the wood building inventory at Fort Polk,” said Michael Norton, the program manager for the Facilities Reduction Program at the Huntsville Center. “Fifty-eight buildings is a large footprint – about three-quarters of a mile will be cleared for new use by the installation.”



Bhate Associates is working with Fort Polk, La., and the Corps of Engineers to remove 58 World War II wood structures. *Photo by Jacob Rothberger, Corps of Engineers Fort Worth District.*



A pile of rubble is all that's left of a World War II wood building at Fort Polk, La. The U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville, Fort Worth District Corps of Engineers, and Bhate Associates are working to remove 58 wood buildings. *Photo by Philip Gamble, Bhate Associates*

All the concrete from the project is being taken to the installation's recycling center where it will be crushed and reused as road base, according to Gary Westby, the Fort Worth District project engineer at Fort Polk. Any asphalt will be taken to a separate recycling center on the installation. All other construction and demolition debris is being hauled off the installation to a private landfill.



Philip Gamble, superintendent, and Eric Chaney, operator supervisor, Bhate Associates, discuss the day's tasks during a project to remove 58 World War II wood buildings from the inventory at Fort Polk, La. *Photo by David Simoneaur, Bhate Associates.*

The wood can be used to a lesser extent. It does not have much value because the wood was treated with non-prohibited chemicals and reuse is limited. It can be crushed and used as a defoliant along fence lines, Norton said.

As of June 22, 33 of the 58 buildings had been taken down.

"It's a pretty straight-forward operation," Westby said. "Keep it wet, knock it down, break up the slab or piers, haul off the debris, cap the utilities, plant grass seed and move on to the next one."

It doesn't take long to demolish the building, Westby said.

"A two-story building across the street came down in three hours," he said. "Of course, it takes longer to clear the area of debris after the building comes down."

According to Philip Gamble, the site superintendent, Bhate has exceeded the installation's recycling expectations. "Everything that can be recycled is being recycled."

"We've been very pleased with the way the contract is progressing," said Scotty Goins, a program manager for the Directorate of Public Works at Fort Polk. "We are really pleased with Bhate's work. They are conscientious of our needs and requests and work with us pretty good."

Goins said a key to the project's success was working out the details of the project at a pre-demolition meeting.

"In our master plan, we have identified facilities in the out-years," Goins said. "We will take these vacant lots and construct new facilities in the future. We save a lot of money because the water, sewage and gas are already in place. There is also less environmental

impact because the site was previously disturbed, meaning that the land is already cleared and utilities are already in place.”

Goins said two individuals deserve a lot of credit for the project’s success.

“Robert Hughes, Fort Polk’s project manager with DPW, has done a great job when we have had to relocate folks. He found homes for them. He also identified furniture that had to be moved prior to demolition. Bernard Harris, DPW’s field guy, also deserves credit for the project’s success. He goes out every day, meets with the contractor, takes photographs and takes care of all the paperwork to ensure the project is well-documented,” Goins said.



Once the building is gone, all that’s left to do is level the area and add grass seed and fertilizer. *Photo by Emily Seidel.*

Fort Polk, home to the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division; 1st Combat Support Brigade (Maneuver Enhancement); and the Joint Readiness Training Center, is supporting the war on terrorism by providing training rotations focused on the Contemporary Operational Environment and Counterinsurgency operations for the Army’s light infantry and special operations forces by deploying home station, National Guard, and reserve component forces in support of Operations Enduring Freedom, Noble Eagle and Iraqi Freedom.