

"This allows us to continue our important mission in the world."

Jyuji Hewitt | Deputy to the commander of the Joint Munitions Command



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Col. Jon Drushal (center), commander at the Radford Army Ammunition Plant, speaks during a groundbreaking ceremony for a new nitric acid and sulfuric acid concentrator site Thursday. The purpose of the new \$103 million facility is to work toward the manufacturing of nitrocellulose, a necessary ingredient in virtually every piece of munitions.

Army plant unholsters key improvement effort

A ceremonial groundbreaking took place at the Radford Army Ammunition Plant, which is replacing a key production building.

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FAIRLAWN — Dirt is expected to start flying Monday on a project to replace a key piece of the Radford Army Ammunition Plant's production process — the key piece, according to plant commander Col. Jon Drushal.

It's a building where nitric acid and sulfuric acid will be concentrated. The process is necessary to the manufacture of nitrocellulose, which is a necessary ingredient in virtually every piece of munitions. Radford is the only place in North America that makes nitric cellulose, Drushal said.

"You've got to remember," he said. "You don't have any [nitrocellulose], you don't have any propellants, you don't have any bullets."

And the bullets manufactured at Radford and other army ammunition plants are in high demand. Two weeks after they come off the production line, Drushal said, they're in a gun in Afghanistan.

The new \$103 million facility, a NAC/SAC in the language of ammunition plants, will replace one built 31

years ago — six years longer than it was designed to last. The new facility is scheduled to be finished in 15 months.

The Radford site is owned by the government and overseen by the Army, but it's operated by a contractor, ATK Energetic Systems. The parent company is Alliant Ammunition and Energetics.

Kent Holiday, vice president and general manager of ATK Energetic Systems, told the 80 or so people gathered for a ceremonial groundbreaking on Thursday, "Two and a half years ago, I didn't know what a NAC/SAC was. But I now know it is a key piece of the military industrial base."

A little more than a year ago, Holiday received a telephone call telling him that key piece was on fire. It turned out to be a small fire, relatively easily controlled, but it revealed serious problems for the arsenal.

"The call that I remember on the NAC/SAC," Drushal said, "is the floor is falling in and it's in danger of tipping over."

There was cavern beneath the building. Filling it in and repairing the floor and other damage caused by the



Col. Jon Drushal Says the site's modernization is a good thing.



Kent Holiday is an executive of the company that operates the site.

fire kept the building off-line for about two weeks.

The ammunitions plant began in 1941 as Radford Ordnance Works. The only manufacturer of nitrocellulose in North America and the only manufacturer of TNT in the United States, it covers 6,901 acres. In 2007, according to the Joint Munitions Command, the plant had an operating budget of \$188,203 and a payroll of \$2 million.

Jyuji Hewitt, deputy to the commander of the Joint Munitions Command, told the group that assembled Thursday, "This is a business that incorporates the heart and soul of America, and you are a part of that."

Though it manufactures elements of propellants used in nearly all kinds and sizes of munitions, only two calibers of rounds are manufactured in full at the plant, the 25 mm and 30 mm rounds fired by A-10 Warthogs, Apache

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helicopters and other aircraft.

Hewitt said the new building will be a world-class facility.

"This allows us to continue our important mission in the world, which is providing the best quality ammunition for our soldiers at an affordable price," Hewitt said.

Radford Mayor Tom Starnes worked at the ammunition plant for 35 years. He was back on Thursday, one of the men ceremoniously shoving shovels into sand hauled in for the occasion. His former employer's new project will be good for Radford, Starnes said the day after Internet, one of Radford's biggest employers, announced it may lay off 140 workers. This project indicates the government intends to keep the plant running and keep its workers working.

"Any time you can modernize, it's good for the community," Starnes said.



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The new facility will be built on the site of a demolished industrial building (foreground) at the Radford Army Ammunition Plant. The new plant will recycle most of its acid during the manufacturing process.

This modernization will be good in several ways, Drushal said.

"The key to today and the groundbreaking and this

facility is the improvements in efficiency and safety and environment that a new facility brings," he said.

The new plant will recycle

up to 98 percent of the acid in the process.

"Any time you can get less waste stream of any sort, it's a great day," he said.