

Picatinny Arsenal — Home of American Firepower

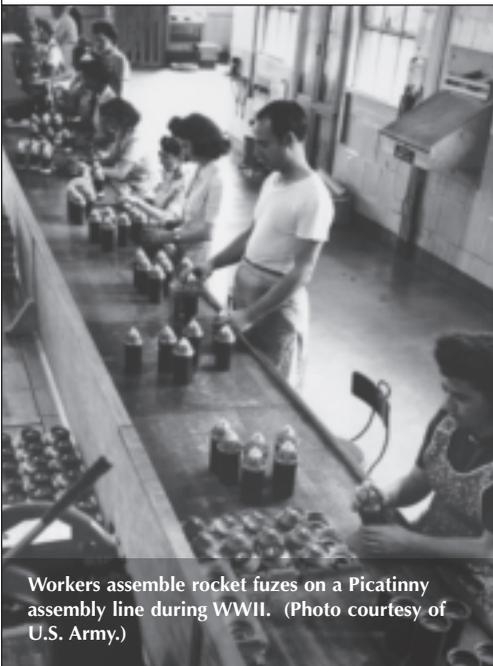
Trish Bryan

On June 26, 1880, the U.S. government purchased 1,195.8 acres of land to build what was referred to as the “Grand Arsenal on the Atlantic Seaboard.” Originally called the Dover Powder Depot, the name was changed just 4 days later to Picatinny Powder Arsenal, NJ. In 1907, it officially became Picatinny Arsenal.

Picatinny's Cannon Gate, one of the most recognizable and enduring Arsenal symbols. The gates were manufactured by the Cornell, NY, Iron Works in 1885 using cannons and cannon balls. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army.)

During the intervening years, more land was purchased, buildings were constructed and a railway was built. One of Picatinny's most enduring symbols, the Cannon Gate, was installed and still greets arsenal visitors today. By the early 1900s, a propellant charge loading activity was initiated, storage facilities were added and the first powder factory was constructed.

The arsenal moved into research and development work and started a school to instruct officers in weaponry sciences. Testing and control laboratories were established during World War I (WWI), as well as a small, experimental plant for design and development of artillery ammunition in 1919. In 1921, the arsenal took over responsibility for experimental work on fuzes. In 1926, lightning struck Navy Hill, an area transferred to the Navy Department to store ammunition. A tree overhanging a magazine that housed 600,000 pounds of TNT was hit, starting a series of explosions. The devastation yielded unexpected, but useful information. By studying the degrees of damage at different ranges, it was possible to calculate the first reliable, safe-distance tables for munition storage.



Workers assemble rocket fuzes on a Picatinny assembly line during WWII. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army.)



Rocket shells for the 3.5-inch Bazooka were tested at Picatinny Arsenal. Overnight, they were put into full production and were destroying Chinese and North Korean tanks 7 days later as hostilities during the Korean War intensified. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army.)

As the reconstruction of Picatinny Arsenal following the fire continued, the balance of world power shifted and Axis countries began increasing stockpiles of arms. By the time the U.S. entered WWII, Picatinny was prepared to play a major role in arming the Nation. As one of the few facilities with the ability to manufacture munitions, it employed 18,000 people and ran three shifts turning out bombs and artillery shells. Still, Picatinny had its research triumphs, especially the development of a delay fuze for skip bombing and special bombs for dams and oil fields. It also pioneered production processes later transferred to munitions manufacturers around the country.

After WWII, and into the Cold War era, Picatinny refocused its efforts on developing new weapons and munitions. Its support to American forces in Korea included an improved bazooka and an illuminating rifle grenade. Ammunition for the world's first nuclear artillery weapon, the 280mm cannon, was developed. In periods of peace, the arsenal made important contributions in the areas of radar, pyrotechnics, missiles, time fuzes and many other munitions. When war broke out again, it gave troops in Vietnam a complete family of 40mm ammunition for grenade launchers and helicopter gunships.

Innovations in 20th century warfare made it possible for the U.S. to maintain battle supremacy in the 1990s and beyond. There were new rules of engagement along with high-tech weaponry such as laser-guided bombs, electronic countermeasures and much more. Picatinny Arsenal played an invaluable role in this new kind of war with the development of smart weapons, the next generation of mounted and dismounted objective crew-served weapons and many other munitions used in the Gulf War, *Operation Desert Storm* and *Operations Enduring* and *Iraqi Freedom*.

As the Army fulfills a vision to transform itself into a 21st century modular land force, it is clear that America will continue to count on Picatinny Arsenal in the future as they have in the past to respond with unwavering commitment, ingenuity and skill. The "Home of American Firepower" will help ensure the legacy of freedom for many generations to come.

TRISH BRYAN is a Project Manager with BRTRC's Technology Marketing Group providing contract support to the Joint Munitions & Lethality Life Cycle Management Command, Project Manager Close Combat Systems and other clients. She has more than 25 years of experience as a marketing and communications professional.