



Chapter 1

THE CLOUDS OF WAR

“In the past few years — and, most violently, in the past few days — we have learned a terrible lesson. We must begin the great task that is before us by abandoning once and for all the illusion that we can ever again isolate ourselves from the rest of humanity. We are going to win the war, and we are going to win the peace that follows.”

— Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dec. 9, 1941

Even as

THE TULSA DISTRICT

was being formed, the clouds of war were gathering on the world’s horizon. But isolationist America clung to a fond hope of peace in the face of a world plunging headlong toward conflict.

Although the District was created for the peaceful use of water resources, the earliest history of its territory, after all, was written by military missionaries:

- Coronado, undoubtedly the first visiting soldier to view the district territory in 1541;
- French explorers and American surveyors who charted the region’s rivers in the early 1800s;
- Fort Gibson soldiers, who opened the historic Three Forks region to settlement in 1824;
- Military roadway builders who linked Fort Smith and Fort Gibson overland in 1826.

Yet the District was born in an era when a weary United States was more concerned with 1930s’ domestic problems. Many Americans were determined to resist what history now recalls as an inexorable march by much of the civilized world toward war.

Threatening

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CIVILIZATION.

In July 1937, the Southwestern Division was being created and was gearing up in the region to implement the 1936 Flood Control Act. Meanwhile,

- Japan was invading China.
- Hitler was preparing to invade Austria.
- Neville Chamberlain was leading Britain and the west in a program to make Hitler reasonable through appeasement.
- In the United States, isolationists were objecting to President Roosevelt’s warning that “the present reign of terror and international lawlessness” had reached a stage “where the very foundations of civilization are seriously threatened.”

Fall, 1938. American attitudes reached a turning point. The Munich Agreement exposed the full cost of appeasement: a Germany hegemony in Central Europe and incentives for further, worldwide intimidation and aggression.

Spring, 1939. While the Corps was writing General Orders No. 3 to establish the Tulsa District, Hitler was invading Czechoslovakia. A new, aggressive government was coming to power in Japan that would soon link with Germany and Italy in a Tripartite Axis Pact, keen on seizing and dominating existing territories throughout the world.