Nov. 18, 1940. The Tulsa District was gearing up for civil works construction, even as national shifts of responsibility took place. Historically, the Quartermaster Corps led in noncombatant construction. Now, Air Corps construction work was transferred to the Army Corps of Engineers.

One year later, on Dec. 1, 1941, President Roosevelt was ordering all Army construction work centralized with the Corps. This put the Tulsa and Denison Districts, as well as others nationwide, directly into the military construction business.

Less than a week later, following the Dec. 7 attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor, the United States was at war.

For those
GENERATIONS OF US REARED IN PEACE, and in an era when it's chic to be cynical about military endeavors, it's hard to conceive the single-minded dedication and patriotism that swept the United States in the wake of Pearl Harbor.

Winning the war — and, most Americans were convinced, saving the world for freedom — required a sudden shift from peacetime to military pursuits both abroad and at home.

Fortunately, both the Tulsa and Denison Districts were already mobilizing for unprecedented work in this period. Most, though not all, peacetime projects were deferred for the duration of the war. The Corps' capability was shifted almost overnight into military construction of the highest urgency.

The region was a prime site for airfields, flying schools, bombing ranges, and aircraft production because of, in part, the area's generous stretches of level terrain and excellent flying weather. (Oklahoma City, for example, averages 328 flying days a year.)

The large, sparsely populated area, with terrain similar to lands where fighting was occurring, was also well suited for training camps.

The first orders were for construction of facilities for aircraft production and maintenance, airfields, training camps, and munitions plants. The devastating attack on Pearl Harbor had spelled out the immediate importance of air power in the government's conduct of the war and gave a special urgency to the work.

The scope, pace, and intensity of the Corps' wartime work almost defy imagination. In some instances, orders to begin construction included directions to effect "immediate" completion. Actual aircraft assembly could not wait for hangars to be completed; assembly often began before the walls of the buildings went up.

At the height of the World War II construction blitz, the Tulsa District completed a new building every 20 minutes, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.[1]

Before the war ended in 1945, the Southwestern Division had handled about $2 billion in military construction work, roughly one-fifth of the U.S. mobilization projects.[2]

A significant share of the important projects were delivered from the Tulsa and Denison Districts, which completed $800 million in construction and procured $100 million in special engineering equipment and supplies. This major part of the stateside work proved essential in winning the war.[3]

It was this work that spelled the difference. Said one military leader, reflecting on the American victory, "Mobilization was decisive and construction generally controlled mobilization."[4]