Chapter 2
WORLD WAR II

"The hand that held the dagger has struck it into the back of its neighbor."

— President Roosevelt, Spring 1940

In the
SPRING OF 1940, Hitler was preparing a blow he hoped would break the will of his western enemies: the blitzkrieg attacks that in rapid succession conquered Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France. More than 350,000 British and French troops had to be rescued at Dunkirk by a flotilla of small boats.

Now Britain stood alone against an axis of expanding German and Italian power that would soon include Japan. The new British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, stirred the imaginations of Americans when he promised his people nothing but "blood, toil, tears, and sweat," with a pledge to "wage war by sea, land, and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us."

Responding to what Americans now perceived as an imminent threat, Congress instituted the first peacetime draft and voted additional funds to increase the size and striking power of military forces, including the construction of 30 new warplane plants.[1] Roosevelt asked Congress for a billion dollars in new defense allocations and called for the production of 50,000 warplanes a year.

The call
FOR THE LIBERATORS came just as the fledgling Tulsa District entered the fray. As early as November 1940, orders had been received to build several small airfields for the Civil Aeronautics Administration.

But in early 1941 the District got its first major military assignment: to build the $27 million Tulsa Aircraft Assembly Plant Number Three. This facility, which now hums under the flag of McDonnell Douglas, was called the Tulsa Bomber Plant. On any scale, this was a major project. Its main building was 320 feet wide and nearly a mile long, and the airfield covered 750 acres. The plant, on land provided by the City of Tulsa, adjoined the Tulsa Municipal Airport.

With dazzling speed, the Denison and Tulsa Districts built facilities needed to mobilize a nation at war. A prime example: the Tulsa Bomber Plant, 1942.

We are the only nation in the world that waits till we get into a war before we start getting ready for it.

— Will Rogers