

## **THE DIFFICULT QUICKLY DONE IN DENISON**

**A** small stateside army named the Denison District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, performed a series of miracles in the early years of World War II — setting the record by producing more work in less time than any of the other 40 Corps districts.

A year and a half into the global war, the District had accomplished “miracle after miracle” to build 56 different projects, ranging from auxiliary airfields to one of the nation’s largest bomber plants, the Denison Herald reported on June 15, 1943.

The list included five ordnance plants, two aircraft assembly factories, seven flying schools, ten other airports, sixteen auxiliary fields, seven prison camps, two aviation mechanic schools, three big hospitals, and four great cantonments, each a large city in itself, accommodating many thousands of men.

And what is more, the Herald reported, “most of this work has been finished ahead of schedule — speed being the last that has driven the engineers steadily forward to achieve undertakings that might have frightened them into surrender had they time to contemplate what was going on and to know how much more was coming.”

What the Herald called a construction blitz of a maze of projects was completed

by “a veritable army of between 50,000 and 60,000 workers . . . including contractor employees and as few as 50 or as many as 3,720 Denison military employees.” (This number does not include civil works employees.)

The Denison District opened its doors with 285 civil employees on Jan 1, 1939; civil employment jumped to a high of 1,700 in the summer of 1942, mostly for work on Denison Dam, then dropped off to 823 by the summer of 1944.

Meanwhile, military work began with 50 employees in early 1941, rose to a high of 3,720 in the summer of 1942, then dropped to 770 by the summer of 1944.

The Herald called the District work “a veritable melting pot in which men and women from all corners of the nation and from all walks of life have intermingled in one common undertaking.” The military projects division was headed first by Major E.J. Wanless and Wanless’s first assistant, Asa Shannon, then by Lt. Col. Quinton C. Harvey.

“Under pressure of the emergency of global war,” the Herald wrote, “the military projects division of the Denison District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has fulfilled the tradition of the Army Engineers — by doing the difficult quickly and by taking a little longer for the impossible.”<sup>6</sup>

Pressure on the staff increased as work schedules accelerated. Quality personnel were hard to find and employment conditions were far from orthodox. In some cases, wartime commissions brought reversals in authority. Some junior engineers in civilian life, when activated in the reserves, returned with a commission to outrank their senior engineer.

At the height of employment activity, both districts employed more than 7,500 Corps personnel. And this was a fraction of the full team involved in the District’s total public/private effort. Others on the team included engineers, architects, construction contractors and subcontractors, and thousands of other employees and workers who, as Settle reported, joined “to work the near miracle without which the war could not have been won.”<sup>7</sup>

Fighting the

### **CALENDAR**

### **AND THE CLOCK,**

Tulsa District workers found that time was as much the enemy as the enemy “over there.” To beat the clock, employees developed new and unconventional methods of