

PINKEY'S PLIGHT



Left, Col. Pinkey. Right, Jack Crawford, now building boomerangs as a retirement hobby.

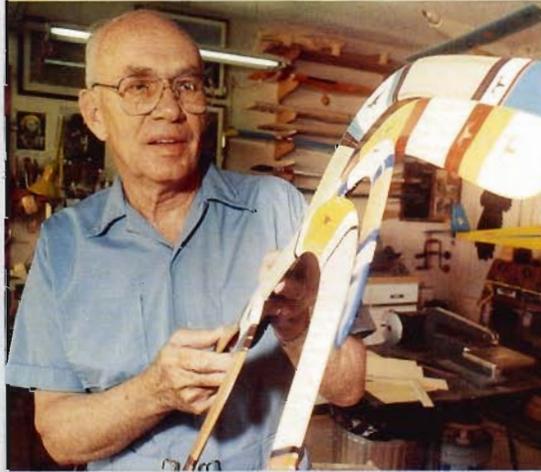


Photo courtesy of Tulsa World

The statement is flat-out and absolute in the official history of the Tulsa District's waterway construction by Dr. Settle:

"No other Tulsa DE [District Engineer] has ever had a challenge of the dimensions of the one Col. Vernon W. Pinkey had during his more than three years in the District."

According to Settle, the challenge came as a surprise when Pinkey arrived in the District in the spring of 1968 and discovered that the waterway had to be operating in 1970.

"Pinkey's Plight," as wags termed it, revolved around limitations on disbursement of funds. To meet the schedule, he had to resolve a series of interlocking problems, including negotiations for four major railroad bridge relocations. And he had to instill the required sense of urgency throughout the organization.

One key step: Pinkey appointed Jack L. Crawford as coordinator for all the Oklahoma parts of the navigation project and gave him authority to get the job done.

"On Dec. 30, 1970, at Lock and Dam 18, the Corps of Engineers workboat Sallisaw and survey boat Arkoma locked through, signifying the official opening of the lock for navigation," Settle reported. The next day Pinkey notified the Chief of Engineers:

"Mission accomplished. Arkansas-Verdigris River System declared open for navigation at Catoosa on 31 December 1970. Included in party on inspection trip this date were Gov. Dewey Bartlett, Congressman Ed Edmondson, and local dignitaries. Details follow. Happy New Year."

Then Chief of Engineers Lt. Gen. F.J. Clarke wired back his congratulations to the entire Tulsa District:

"This schedule . . . has required unprecedented effort on part of the Corps, its contractors, as well as local interests, the Congress, and three presidential administrations. The engineering achievement is monumental and will continue for years to come to be used as an outstanding example of what can be done to meet a national challenge."⁸