

## MAJOR GENERAL CLARENCE L. TINKER

*By John Woolery\**

General Tinker, Oklahoma hero who lost his life in the Battle of Midway, brought with his name in that of Tinker Air Force Base, the proud background of the Osage Nation, and the courage and gallantry of those men who out-fought and out-witted the Japanese in the Battle of Midway.

He was one-eighth Osage Indian, born at Elgin, Kansas, on November 21, 1887. His formal military education began at sixteen when he entered Wentworth Military Academy at Lexington, Missouri. He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Philippine Constabulary in 1908, and served there for four years before transferring to the regular army. In 1917 when the United States entered World War I, he was transferred to his own country and was stationed at Douglas, Arizona in a training capacity, although he had hoped for active duty assignment.

Following the war, General Tinker became interested in aviation and began flight training at March Field, California. In 1926, he served as Assistant Military Attache at the American Embassy in London, England, and while there, was awarded the Soldier's Medal for extricating a companion from a burning plane.

In 1927, he served on the Air Corps Staff and for the next twelve years held positions as Commanding Officer of various domestic army air fields. From May, 1940, he held the following positions: Commanding General, MacDill, Florida; Commanding General, Third Interceptor Command, Drew Field, Florida; and finally Commanding General of the Air Forces in Hawaii, which post he held until he was reported missing in action on June 7, 1942, while personally leading his bomber command against the enemy.

### OKLAHOMA CITY AIR MATERIEL AREA TINKER AIR FORCE BASE

When it was learned that the Air Forces had under consideration building a depot that would be centrally located in the United States, Mr. R. A. Singletary, a resident of Oklahoma City and

---

\* John Woolery, under the Adjutant General's Office for the Oklahoma City Air Materiel Area, edits and prepares histories for this Air Materiel Area and its subordinate installations, and coordinates releases of historical data to the public with the Public Information Officer of this Command. In October, 1942, Mr. Woolery was transferred to this Headquarters from the Indian Service where he had worked as employment agent for several years. He is one-half Choctaw Indian, World War I veteran, and attended the Oklahoma City University.—Ed.

Chamber of Commerce representative in Washington, conferred with Colonel F. M. Kennedy, Chief of Buildings and Grounds Division of the Air Forces, on the advantages of locating the depot in Oklahoma City.

On March 9, 1941, the Site Board of the Air Forces arrived in Oklahoma City to make a selection of a site. Two sites were under consideration at that time but it was finally agreed between the Board and the officials of the City of Oklahoma City and Chamber of Commerce that the site located just off Southeast 29th Street would be the location for the potential Air Depot.

The officials of the City of Oklahoma City agreed to turn over to the Government the 960 acres donated by citizens of Oklahoma City for the sum of ten dollars and other considerations. The legal description of Tract No. 1 is: East half of Section 15, W $\frac{1}{2}$  of Section 14, NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 22, NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 23, Township 11 North, Range 2 West of the Indian Meridian, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma.

Subsequent to the announcement signed by Assistant Secretary of War, Robert Patterson, that the award of the long-awaited project had been assigned to Oklahoma City and the 960 acres turned over to the Federal Government, immediate proceedings were taken to open the way for construction.

In July, 1941, a contract was awarded to J. Gordon Turnbull, Sverdrup and Parcel, Cleveland, Ohio, as consulting engineers and architects for planning and designing of the Air Depot. Tentative plans for the location of buildings were drafted and the general plan was approved with some minor changes to be made.

The contract for the prime construction of the Air Depot was awarded to Dunning-James-Patterson on a cost-plus-a-fixed-fee basis. This type of contract avoids advertising for bids and in that way construction of the Air Depot was started immediately, even before the plans were complete. This was an important point, considering the fact that the plans called for the initial completion date of March, 1942.

The question of a name for the Air Depot met with some confusion since there was already an established Oklahoma City Air Field. The matter however was settled on May 21, 1941 in a letter from Chief of Engineers in Washington to the Division Engineers at Dallas, Texas, in which the new project was designated Midwest Air Depot. This name, signifying the scope of territory the depot would serve and the name to be used in all future correspondence and references. It was Midwest Air Depot for almost a year until on March 1, 1942 the War Department established Oklahoma City Air Depot as an installation under the jurisdiction of Air Serv-

ice Command, Patterson Field, Fairfield, Ohio, and was activated as such on that date.

A name for the field on which the Air Depot was being built was brought up before the Naming Board of the War Department. The name Tinker was suggested in honor of the Oklahoma hero who lost his life in the Battle of Midway. There was some controversy over naming the field for an individual due to the fact that it would require the perspective of time to decide which hero most merited the honor. However, it was finally decided on October 15, 1942 by command of Henry H. Arnold, Commanding General of the Air Forces, that the field would be designated Tinker Field, in honor of Major General Clarence L. Tinker, U. S. Army.

During the month of December, 1941, it became known that William Turnbull, Colonel, Air Corps, assigned as Supply Officer. San Antonio Air Depot, Duncan Field, San Antonio, Texas, had been appointed by the Air Service Command to command the depot. On January 15, 1942, Colonel Turnbull arrived from the San Antonio Air Depot to take charge of the project. Personnel employed, which numbered from 2,600 to 2,800 were detached to the San Antonio Air Depot for training. Of this number approximately 2,400 returned to Oklahoma City. This number was supplemented by approximately 300 experienced individuals from the San Antonio Air Depot, surrounding subordinate installations and other governmental agencies. This cadre was to be used for staffing purposes and to serve as a nucleus in establishing the new organization.

Temporary headquarters were established in the Commerce Exchange building, which consisted of one room, equipped with such discarded furniture as the building manager was able to assemble for his new tenants. A small warehouse building located on West Ninth Street, Oklahoma City, was leased for the receipt storage, and issue of supplies and equipment for the new organization.

It was not long before the headquarters of the depot organization outgrew the location in the Commerce Exchange building, and on April 4, 1942, it was moved to the Bass Building where several floors were available for expansion. It was in the Bass Building that the maintenance division and the staff offices of the organization were activated.

Civilian training was given its inception in February, 1942. The first training unit to be established was the maintenance training unit, an off-reservation school in which classes were held in sheet metal, electricity, machine shop, radio and engines. In August, 1942, additional classes were started in the state armory building for both supply and maintenance division training. In anticipa-

tion of the great demand for workers, arrangements were made with the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater, Oklahoma and the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, to conduct classes in mechanic's trades. Prior to the establishment of depot training at the State armory building, the supply division instituted its own training school while located in the Bass building. Supervisors and key personnel acted in the capacity of training instructors as well as performed the functions of on-the-job training.

On July 20, 1942, the supply division moved to the depot site in the new quarters, depot supply buildings, commonly known as Depot Supply No. 1 and Depot Supply No. 2. About the middle of August the maintenance operations moved to their quarters on the field. Headquarters and other miscellaneous departments moved the latter part of August. By the close of the year 1942, all departments of the new organization were in full operation and had located on Tinker Field.

During the period of extensive expansion within the AF organization, the depot experienced many important organizational changes, thus changing the name of the organization many times since the first designation of Midwest Air Depot, May 21, 1941. On March 1, 1942, the name Midwest Air Depot was changed to Oklahoma City Air Depot. The installation was designated Tinker Field on October 15, 1942, and its name became Oklahoma City Air Depot, Tinker Field. Later other name changes were made as indicated:

Oklahoma City Air Depot Control Area Command.....February 1, 1943  
Tinker Field

Oklahoma City Air Service Command.....May 17, 1943  
Tinker Field

Oklahoma City Air Technical Service Command.....November 14, 1944  
Tinker Field

Oklahoma City Air Materiel Area.....July 2, 1946  
Tinker Field

Tinker Field was redesignated Tinker Air Force Base on February 5, 1948 and since that date the installation has been known as Oklahoma City Air Materiel Area, Tinker Air Force Base.

The Oklahoma City Air Materiel Area, during World War II, was responsible for reconditioning, modification or modernization of aircraft, vehicles and equipment.

The first engine to be completely overhauled at this Depot was the Wright Aeronautical R-1820 engine for B-17 aircraft. Its production gradually increased to an extent that 12,278 of this type engine had been overhauled by V-J Day (September 2, 1945). This Depot pioneered the overhaul of the Wright Aeronautical R-3350 engine for B-29 aircraft. The R-3350 was made to perform its mis-

sion during the war for long and extended flights. Schedule for overhaul and test of this engine at one time reached a peak of 1,000 for a month's schedule. Improved and powerful engines used in both Jet fighters and bombers are overhauled and tested at Tinker Air Force Base.

Since the War, this Headquarters has continued to overhaul and recondition a number of heavy bombers as the B-29, B-50, B-36 and B-45; F-47 and F-84 fighters; C-54, C-97 and C-47 cargo planes and other military aircrafts and various types of motor vehicles for delivery to operational segments of the Air Force. Reconditioning of R-3350 engines approached World War II proportions by April, 1949, when the Engine Repair Section turned out 780 B-29 engines a month. By June 30, 1949, approximately 9,100 engines were overhauled. World War peak was 1,000 a month. The depot supply functions during the War and during peacetime operations have been to accomplish the receipt, storage, issue, salvage, disposal and stock control over materiel used by the Air Forces.

During the War, the Oklahoma City Air Materiel geographical area consisted of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and the portion of Texas north of the 33d degree of North Latitude. The geographical area has remained the same.<sup>1</sup>

Major General F. S. Borum, an Oklahoman who was reared at Muskogee, has been in command of the Installation since July 15, 1945.

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Oklahoma City Air Materiel Area, with headquarters at Tinker Air Force Base, is one of seven areas in the Air Materiel Command. It is the largest of the seven."—*Information Booklet* issued by Headquarters, Oklahoma City Air Materiel Area, Tinker Air Force Base, in August, 1948.