



1948-1957

The fifth decade of the

Kansas City District

World Events

1948

- Flood Control Act, Section 205, authorizes Corp of Engineers to transfer funds to small flood control projects not specifically authorized by Congress and it establishes emergency fund to be expended under supervision of the Chief of Engineers, when local cooperation is obtained.
- Kansas City District completes Kanopolis dam.
- Corps of Engineers and the Department of Agriculture clarify their roles and responsibilities in a Memorandum of Understanding for a restudy of the Osage River basin.
- Work begins on the Missouri River Levee System, which was authorized in the 1944 Flood Control Act.

1949

- Soviet atomic explosion.
- Kansas City District is assigned military mobilization work at heartland Air Force bases.
- Office of the Chief of Engineers approves the use of quarry-run stone as an alternative construction method for river improvement structures.

1950

- North Korean forces launch invasion into South Korea.
- Engineering training is resumed at Fort Leonard Wood
- Congress passes Civil Defense Recovery Act. and the Korean War expansion program presents new challenges to the Kansas City District.
- Program of navigation channel improvements is scheduled for completion during fiscal year 1959.
- The Osage River basin plan, developed under guidance of a coordinating committee named by the governor of Missouri, is submitted to Congress.

1951

- The Chief of Engineers officially assigns the Kansas City District to a military mission.
- Catastrophic flood in lower Missouri basin produces discharge of 636,000 cubic feet per second at the river's confluence with the Mississippi. Extensive damages result in the nation's first \$1 billion flood.
- Greater Kansas City Flood Prevention Committee hosts Emergency Flood Conference.

1952

- A new flood emergency frightens a "flood shy" public in the Kansas City area, at Riverside area, levees and floodwalls damaged the previous year withstand the new crests.
- Construction begins on Tuttle Creek Lake, a key unit in the Kansas River basin system.
- Kansas City District places Harlan County dam in operation.



100 YEARS OF HISTORY

1948 - 1957 *Dam construction era resumes in lue of cold war threat*

When he signed the 1944 Flood Control Act, Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated the nation's most comprehensive river basin development plan. The Missouri River basin portion of the plan, known as Pick-Sloan, authorized federal agencies to coordinate plans with the states to control floods, irrigate lands, develop hydroelectric power, assist navigation, supply potable water, control erosion, conserve fish and wildlife, and provide public recreation.

The vast civil works mission embodied in Pick-Sloan provided challenging opportunities for the Kansas City District. It is the foundation for the District's current water and related land resources work.

Maj. Gen. Lewis A. Pick, Division Engineer, Missouri River Division, implemented the Pick-Sloan plan on 21 March 1946, when he started a pile driver used to build the flood wall in the Kansas City bottomlands. This project was a sound decision.

There was no disputing the flood threat that existed in the industrial districts situated on the flood plain at the confluence of the Kansas River with the Missouri River. This was exactly the kind of project the 1944 Flood Control Act addressed "in the interest of national security and with a view toward providing . . . useful and worthy public works for the post-war construction program."

The Kansas City District wanted to complement urban flood protection structures with dams located upstream. Many rural interests in Kansas and Missouri opposed reservoirs permanently flooding agricultural land. The Kansas City District was at the center of dispute between the rural and the urban interests.

Before WWII, Congress approved the District's Kansas River basin plan for a series of dams above the metropolitan areas. The District began construction on the Kanopolis dam in 1940, but the war stopped it. Kanopolis was reauthorized and work resumed in 1946.

When rural interests opposed its sister project, the Milford dam, the District initiated construction on the Harlan County dam on the Republican River. The people in this south-central Nebraska area of the Kansas River watershed wanted a big dam because they had experienced a flood disaster in 1935.

Harlan and Kanopolis were pluses for the Kansas City District. Both projects provided substantial flood damage reductions before other projects authorized with them were even initiated.

The Tuttle Creek project on the Big Blue tributary stream of the Kansas River is a sad example of a project delayed by local opposition. The Kansas City District wanted the project as part of its plan for protection of downstream cities such as Manhattan, Topeka, and Lawrence, as well as the Kansas City metropolitan area.

The District had avid support from the Flood Protection Planning Committee for Greater Kansas City, which declared prophetically in 1949 that "untold suffering and the loss of many millions of dollars would be sustained" if the authorized program for the Kansas River basin was delayed.

The District had no such support for its Osage basin plans in Missouri. Local interests there favored upstream watershed treatment to reduce runoff and wanted additional features added to studies of potential projects.

The state of Missouri protested that "No development program should be approved until it is a coordinated plan in which all of the major resources, including recreation and wildlife, have been appropriately considered and provided for in the program." The state got the restudy it wanted and the Kansas City District was allowed to broaden the parameters of its basin studies.

While engaged in restudies of its plans for tributary streams, the District pursued both levee construction and channel improvements on the main stem. In 1945, Congress approved a navigation program for the Missouri River from Sioux City to the mouth.

Improvement work consisted of "permeable dikes" to direct the flow of the river, and thereby shorten and deepen the channel to 9-foot depth. The District's engineers forced the river into the designed alignment then stabilized the banks with quarried stone.

Stabilizing the channel was popular. It protected the District's Pick-Sloan agricultural levees and helped secure private property and public infrastructures in the bottomlands.

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While the Kansas City District was fulfilling its heavy civil works mission, the international situation became grimmer. Korea erupted into war and the United States locked in competition with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The term “Cold War” to characterize East-West relations was given prominence as early as 1948. The Kansas City District’s military mission had officially ended the year previous, but with increased tensions and armed conflict it was again asked to perform work for national security.

On 25 January 1951, the Chief of Engineers issued a General Order assigning the Kansas City District to a military mission.

The District’s first engineering task was to assist the Air Force to modernize and expand its facilities at five locations in the states of Missouri and Kansas. Three of the sites had been used during WWII and required renovation and new construction to accommodate medium range bombers.

Two of the air bases for which the District provided technical engineering were to be newly built. Wichita A.F.B. was established primarily so that training in the B-47 could take place adjacent to the factory where the bomber was produced.

Whiteman A.F.B. was a Strategic Air Command training center for B-52 aircraft. The District had to construct a sensitive time-phased series of primary projects and support facilities for this critical defense facility.

Pursuing the ground war in Korea required the Kansas City District to support the reopening of ordnance works in the heartland. Deterioration

had occurred in the period of idleness between wars, especially since the plants had been designed for a short life. In addition, technical advances had been made in ordnance production. Reopening these facilities commanded a large part of the District’s workload.

The District was assigned to a variety of Army projects as well. At Fort Leavenworth, the District engineered and oversaw construction of the Command and General Staff College’s new facilities, officers’ quarters, and a new hospital. Fort Riley was virtually transformed with new facilities including regimental headquarters, a hospital, gymnasium, chapel, and living quarters. Fort Leonard Wood got new classrooms, along with a number of other improvements to the post’s infrastructure.

The Kansas City District was distracted from its focus on the military mission when in July 1951 nature erupted over the Kansas River basin. The resulting flood was a devastating disaster.

Maj. Gen. Pick, now the Chief of Engineers, was angry. In the grim reality of ruin, he charged that advocates of nonstructural solutions had created a delusion. He held them accountable for the delays in getting authorized dams built.

So did the Greater Kansas City Flood Prevention Committee. It hosted a flood control meeting to encourage action to demand a fast start to the District’s delayed reservoir plans in Kansas and Missouri.

And the Kansas City Star editorial staff weighed in. In exceedingly blunt language for a newspaper with a large farmer-reader population, the editors wrote that “Any man who

says terraces and ponds could have held the water through this sopping month of daily rains is dealing with absurdity. . . . And we are all paying an awful price for the political persuasion of absurdity.”

In the aftermath of the flood of 1951, the forces of obstructionism to the District’s reservoirs were defeated. In Washington, congressional members who had been procrastinating for months over appropriations quickly voted out a budget bill with the money to accelerate the schedule for Missouri basin projects.

In October 1952, the Kansas City District initiated construction on Tuttle Creek dam and reservoir located about five miles north of Manhattan, which is situated on the Kansas River.

Another ironic timely twist of nature provided impetus to broaden support for the Kansas City District’s water resource development program. The Kansas River basin which was so tragically damaged by too much water in 1951 was plagued by a shortage of water just two years later. Drought gave credence to the value of storing water in the District’s reservoirs.

Corps lakes would become popular for their performance in flood protection, in dependability for water supply, and for recreation. The 1954 Flood Control Act authorized or reauthorized eight big dam and reservoir projects for the Kansas City District. Its dam building program was active for about five decades.