



# 100 YEARS OF HISTORY

## Policy and Planning Challenges

Between the late 1960s and the 1970s, the Kansas City District military and civil works missions incurred setbacks. The Vietnam War and inflation forced legislators to impose fiscal austerity on civil works projects. The District's military mission was slashed when the Department of Defense reorganized.

As the Kansas City District completed flood control projects and reduced the threat of catastrophic flooding, the issues of water resource development became more complex.

The Corps of Engineers civil works program was barraged by new legislation and blistering criticism. No longer would the engineers proceed with projects having support only of influential politicians or local elites. The outdoor editor of the Kansas City Star charged that the District's lake supporters were the "frontmen" lobbying for the Corps of Engineers. "One urges on the other, and it's an unholy alliance that eats up billions of dollars of federal money."

The Bureau of the Budget criticized the Corps of Engineers for a lack of comprehensive planning and its reliance on engineering feasibility to produce benefits and costs. The Corps of Engineers' prestige and credibility were at stake.

Water resource law mandated the Corps of Engineers to bring a spectrum of viewpoints into an expanded planning process requiring environmental, social, and macroeconomic considerations.

Chief of Engineers Lt. Gen. Frederick Clarke encouraged "as broad public and private participation as practical in defining environmental objectives and in eliciting viewpoints of what the public wants and expects as well as what it is projected to need..."

[Editors comment: Although these statements might seem obvious with decades of hindsight, it is important to remember that the very concept of public involvement was new to federal organizations until the early 1970s. Water projects were often driven by congressional advocates and local promoters and had minimal public involvement during planning.]

Interdisciplinary planning would guide future water projects. The Corps was slow to open the planning process and to add social scientists to its district staffs. Civil engineers concerned with building a technically sound project doubted the value of social science in the engineering planning process.

With their emphasis on values and alternatives to traditional engineering solutions, social scientists could obstruct and increase the cost, or even scuttle water projects. With budget constraints, inflation, and its heavy construction workload, the Kansas City District resisted adding to the staff. In short, the engineering division handled planning and they did not consider it on par with engineering and construction.

The military leaders in USACE were prepared to accede to the federal momentum for reform of water resources planning. The Corps elected to diversify and strengthen the planning staff and pull it out of the engineering organization. The Kansas City District established a planning division, placed it on the organizational level with the engineering division and staffed it with young professionals trained in social science disciplines.

The Kansas City District was heavy loaded with new civil works planning issues that challenged the realigned planning and engineering staffs. Its Truman project is a textbook illustration of this challenge.

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The Environmental Defense Fund filed suit in 1972 to halt construction of the Harry S. Truman dam, which had experienced delays because of funding. The EDF charged the District had not met NEPA requirements. The District's Chief of Engineering, an attorney, devoted himself to working on the lawsuit for several months.

The U.S. District Court concluded the Kansas City District had "taken substantial and concrete steps" in preparing an environmental impact study even though the project had been under construction for five years before NEPA. The court supervised the District's conclusion of the study.

The Government Accounting Office was not satisfied with the Truman project. The GAO charged the District's cost estimating procedures were faulty and that it ought to have told the Congress the power production project could not pay for itself.

The congressional appropriations subcommittees said the District could not control the inflationary spiral and continued allocating minimal funding to keep some work going at Truman. Meanwhile, the project's critics, like the project itself, were only delayed.

The Kansas City District's mission to support the military effort was also hindered by the nation's economic woes.

The Nixon administration imposed budget ceilings on military expenditures. In 1970 the Department of Defense announced a two-fold plan which greatly affected the Kansas City District.

The DOD was undertaking a reorganization to reduce its manpower and facilities requirements as the end of the war in Vietnam drew near.

A second part of the DOD's plan reduced the number of Corps districts with military construction missions from 17 to 10.

On Mar. 4, 1970, the Kansas City District Engineer informed the staff the District's military mission was ended. At that time, the District's personnel authorization for military projects was 226 employees.

The Kansas City District's military mission in the period to 1970 was of special service to the nation. It was a time in which the people of the District grew professionally. Their development kept pace with a wide variety of challenging assignments and the rapid pace of innovative technology coming from the defense industry.

A review of the project assignments in this period reveals the importance of an experienced organization with highly trained, skilled and dedicated personnel who are in a "ready" position prepared to serve.

