

History of North American's Kansas City Plant

Brilliant Kansas City Achievement Conceived in Bitter Days of the War in 1940

After two years of the European war, the Rome, Berlin, Tokyo axis was a potential threat to both shores of the United States. The Federal Government and manufacturers concerned realized from the recent European examples that decentralization of industry further inland would be of prime importance in the event of a naval and aerial blitz on this country by the axis.

Shortage of labor in the highly industrialized coastal cities also was a major factor in the decision of the government to establish mid-western aircraft production centers.

Co-ordinate for Peak Production
On December 7, 1940, the War Department announced plans for the erection of a government-built and owned assembly plant with North American as the managing contractor in Kansas City. At the same time came the first news of the proposed coordination for peak production by North American Aviation, Inc., the contractor, and the Fisher Body Division of General Motors Corp. as major subcontractor.

The idea of teaming up with the motor car industry was first conceived by J. H. "Dutch" Kindelberger, President of North American, and C. E. Wilson, president of General Motors, as the most logical solution to the problem which confronted the aviation industry in 1940 when it was called on to build planes in larger quantities than it was ever dreamed possible a few years before.

★ Christening of 1st B-25 ★



The first B-25 came off the Kansas City assembly line Dec. 23, 1941, just two weeks after Pearl Harbor. Mrs. Thomas L. Bender, wife of the first employee on the final assembly line,

christened the plane at an all-plant ceremony. . . . Insert—Jan. 3, 1942, employees assembled on the east flight ramp to watch the No. 1 Kansas B-25 make its maiden flight.

On December 10, 1940, Mr. Kindelberger said, "We have long been studying a means of utilizing the tremendous production capacity of the automotive industry in order to expedite deliveries. North American Aviation has agreed to take over the designing, constructing and equipping of a new plant in Kansas City, and to operate it as long as necessary to aid in the National Defense Air Expansion Program.

Production Program Tripled

Under the original agreement, Fisher Body Division of General Motors was to supply approximately 60 per cent of the parts and assemblies for the B-25, which was being built at Inglewood and would be built at the Kansas City plant when the project was substantially completed. However, the big Kansas City project changed and expanded in scope into a manufacturing plant with triple the original

production program, and at the period of peak production of

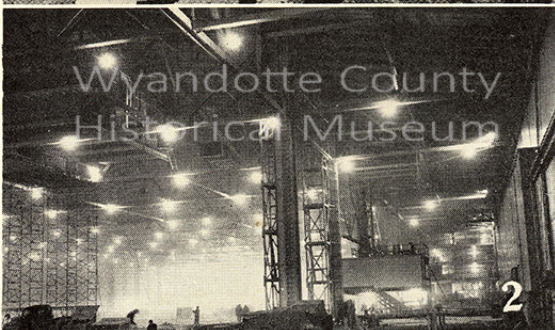
13 ships per day, North American was manufacturing 62 per cent and Fisher 38 per cent.

The main Fisher plant used in the B-25 project was at Memphis. It originally included 300,000 square feet of floor area available for production. Fisher Body Division engineering tool experts and factory study men were dispatched to North American at Inglewood to obtain correlating data required by General Motors.

Automotive Plants Converted

The plan was to have the automotive plants convert to B-25 production and follow essentially the same fabrication and sub-assembly methods then employed in the Inglewood plant. Drawings for all tools and jigs were supplied by the Fisher liaison men in Inglewood, together with a limited number of sample templates. In advance of the production of its share of airplane sections, General Motors was furnished with one hundred sets of detailed parts, namely, the

★ Early Day Scenes ★



Picture No. 1 shows site of North American plant with earth moving machinery in action; No. 2 is an in-

side shot of the high bay during construction and No. 3 is the ground-breaking on March 8, 1941. Left to

right with shovels are Gov. Payne Ratner of Kansas, Lt. Col. Nielson of the U. S. engineers and J. H.

(Dutch) Kindelberger, president of North American. Thousands of Kansas Citizens witnessed the ceremony.

Kansas City Plant History

(Continued from page 5)

ing on the Fairfax site on March 8, 1941, production of the first airplane and subsequent planes kept pace with the construction of the plant, and when the first airplane was christened "Miss Greater Kansas City" by the wife of the first employee on December 23, the plant was still in a construction stage.

The first six airplanes came complete from Inglewood. From ship 7 to 100, Inglewood supplied the Kansas City portion. From ship 101, Kansas City carried its manufacturing load.

Modification Center

In the spring of 1942 the Modification Center was built to give production airplanes to the Allies before these major changes could be made in the assembly lines at the plant.

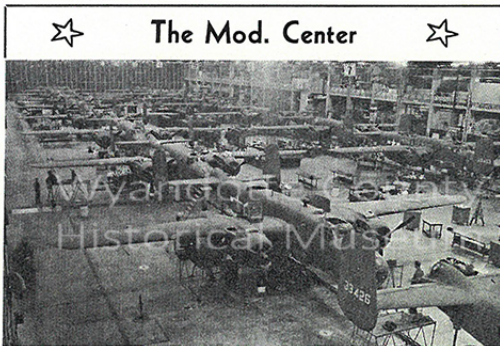
In the ever changing air war, North American was called upon many times to produce airplanes for specific projects where changes in climate or geographical conditions made modifications in the airplanes necessary. These were produced at the Modification Center until the modifications were incorporated in the final assembly line at the main plant in 1944.

The projects of the Modification Center were necessarily confidential in nature. Months before the public knew about the airplane that carried a cannon, the installations were being made at the Modification Center. Many other modifications which later became standard production line additions were first placed in Mitchells at the Modification Center.

During the life of the Modification Center, more than



The high bay final assembly area at the plant is shown at the peak of production in 1944. The high bay is 84½ feet high, 355 feet wide and it is 1,060 feet from the front to the door.



At North American's Modification Center at Kansas City 5,000 B-25s

were prepared for specific battle assignments.

5,000 airplanes were modified. All but 119 were B-25s. The

119 were North American P-51 Mustangs.

In July, 1942, it was decided to accelerate the B-25 program to accelerate the new contract to be produced entirely by North American. This program required the completion of the "bay" area, originally planned for a B-29 program, which was cancelled in favor of accelerated B-25 schedule. The conversion got under way in October, 1942, and completed in June, 1943, assembly rearrangement the last on the list of modifications. Production of airplanes was increased through this period.

Model for Aircraft Industry

The Kansas City plant quickly became a model of the aircraft industry. In 1 more medium bombers were produced there than in other plant in the world.

In May, June and July that year the plant produced

Winter and Summer on the Flight Ramp

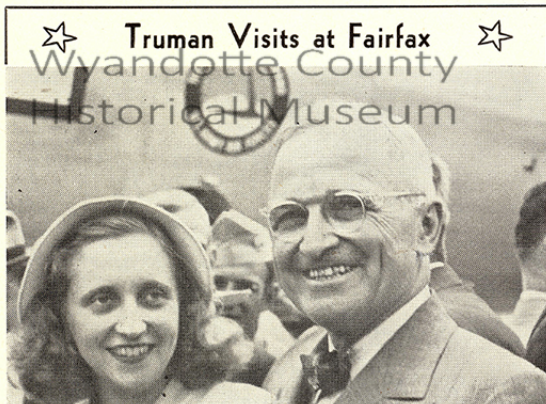


Winter and summer on the flight ramp. Left: A busy summer scene east

of the high bay. Center, H. R. Raynor, plant manager, picks an icicle

from a Mitchell on a zero day. Right, the same flight ramp shot from the

roof of the high bay during a blizzard. Men worked throughout the storm.



June 27, 1945, President Harry S. Truman paid his first visit to Kansas City after becoming president. His big transport plane landed at Fairfax airport just after noon. He was first greeted by his daughter, Margaret.

Surrender By Japs Brings Stop to Production of Famed B-25 Mitchells

(Continued from page 3)

of Kansas, in which 59,337 men and women of Greater Kansas City had produced 6,608 B-25 Mitchells, plus 947 more in spare parts, ceased to exist as the great war machine

into a "plowshare" for peace. Although the disposal of the property is a duty of the federal government which owns it, it is safe to say that the vast majority of it will see its way into civilian enterprises.

A City in Itself

A history of North American Aviation, Inc. of Kansas appears elsewhere in this newspaper. It is a short history because the whole story cannot be told in volumes. North American was a city in itself, with its own schools, transportation system, fire and police departments, super highways and side streets, recreation facilities and cafeteria system.

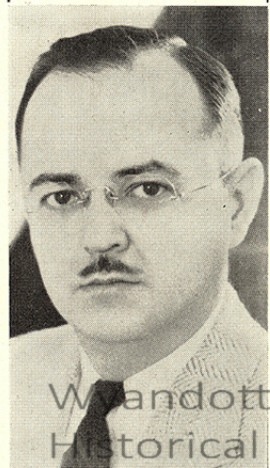
Its employee family at one time was the greatest in any industry in a 7-state area, including Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Oklahoma and Iowa. Fifty-five thousand persons were trained in jobs. They will represent a permanent labor pool in this area.

Huge Employee Family

Another indication of its size is that before the war the largest industry in Greater Kansas City had 3,000 employees. North American Aviation's employee family at one time was more than eight times the size of that pre-war industry.

Employees have read in the local newspapers the present program of North American Aviation. Probably 3,000 employees will be released Monday. The remainder, with the exception of those who will help turn the property back to the government, and members of plant protection and maintenance departments, will be released Tuesday.

Ass't Plant Mgr.



Carlton H. Wolf, assistant plant manager of the Kansas City plant.

that set a world's record for medium bomber production.

Twenty-five million dollars in facilities and equipment which accounted for untold millions of dollars worth of enemy wreckage in ships, planes, buildings, hangars, bridges and property of all kinds, then became a weapon which would quickly be turned

History of the Kansas City Plant

(Continued from page 9)

Inglewood and Kansas City plants during 1943.

Almost immediately following the announcement of this achievement the plant was given the Army-Navy "E" for production efficiency.

In September, Henry Hogan, chairman of the board of directors (Continued on page 11)

From North American Aviation, Inc. of Kansas

4,841

Men and Women Have Entered the Armed Forces of the United States

Famous Visitors



Many prominent persons visited the plant and Modification Center to see B-25s in the making. Some of them were: 1—Douglas "Wrong Way" Corrigan ferried B-25s as a civilian pilot for the Air Transport Command. . . . 2—The then Brig. Gen. Jimmie Doolittle came here soon after returning from his famous B-25 raid over Tokyo in April, 1942. . . . 3—Forrest C. Donnell, center, visited the plant when he was governor of

Missouri. He is now a United States senator. . . . 4—Donald M. Nelson made a detailed tour of the plant as chairman of the War Production Board. . . . 5—Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, talked with many of the employees as she toured the plant. . . . 6—Lt. Gen. William S. Knudsen, production chief for the War Department, made several inspection tours of the plant during the early years of production.