RESTRICTED

2

PUBLIC WORKS IN WORLD WAR II

15 May 1947

CONTENTS

Page

SPEAKER--Major General P. B. Fleming, Administrator, Federal Works Agency 1

GENERAL DISCUSSION 10

THE INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE OF THE ARMED FORCES

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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THE INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE OF THE ARMED FORCES

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15 May 1947

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

Gentlemen, this morning we are very fortunate to have with us Major General Philip B. Fleming, about whom you all know. I think he probably needs no introduction. However, I will bring you up to date and tell you that General Fleming graduated from West Point in 1911 and attended the Engineering School and the Army War College.

Beginning in 1933, he served in a key capacity in various government departments, acting, successively, as Executive Officer and Deputy Administrator of the Public Works Administration; Coordinator of the Resettlement Administration; Administrator, Wage and Hour Division, Department of Labor; and, since December 1941, as Administrator of the Federal Works Agency.

In the latter part of the war, General Fleming visited Russia, the Scandinavian Countries, and Western Europe on special missions with regard to postwar construction programs. It happens that General Fleming's path and my path crossed twice during that trip of his.

His subject this morning is, "Public Works in World War II." I take extreme pleasure in introducing Major General Philip B. Fleming.

GENERAL FLEMING:

General McKinley and gentlemen: I regard it as a homecoming to come back here to what I know as Washington Barracks. I was stationed here when I was a Second Lieutenant attending the Engineering School. A group of five of us bachelors lived uptown and commuted down here everyday. We were quite happy uptown. But the house next to the Commanding Officer's residence became vacant and an officer, whose wife the Commanding Officer's wife did not like, was to move into the vacant house. So we five bachelor Lieutenants were ordered down here to occupy that house, I suppose it being figured that five Second Lieutenants could outrank a Major.

That was only the beginning. We had the distinction of living, thereafter, in every house on that line over there, except the middle house. We were just pushed around from pillar to post in order to keep somebody out. We would be gone for a day and come back and not know just which quarters we were living in. We would have to inquire at the gate to find out where we had been moved.

It has been said that the American Civil War was the first of the modern military conflicts. It was modern in the sense that it foreshadowed the development of many modern weapons, but more especially in the sense that for almost the first time in war whole peoples were involved to a considerable degree.

But U. S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, I feel sure, would have been amazed if they could have been told that the day would come when the construction of a sewer system in Mobile, or the operation of a child-care center in Detroit, would be deemed essential to a military victory in the South Pacific or on the beaches of Europe.

World War II was a total war, which means that it affected everything and everybody in the country to some extent--the effect generally increasing as time wore on. Not even the aged, unable to work, wholly escaped, for if nothing else they were affected by rationing and short supplies of consumer goods. You could not have cuffs on the bottom of your trousers, you could not buy a vest to go with a double-breasted coat, and the two-pants suit went the way of the dodo. For the most part these small trials and tribulations, and in a great many cases certain downright hardships, were borne with cheerfulness and a minimum of protest and the military has little cause to complain of any lack of support on the home front.

The effects on many towns and cities were in some cases rather surprising and they brought many difficult problems to the Federal Works Agency.

When war began in Europe the United States was still in the depression that had begun ten years earlier and there was still large-scale unemployment. In the month that Hitler invaded Poland, the Public Works Administration was employing 229,000 persons in a program of construction largely designed to relieve unemployment, and 1,700,000 persons were employed on WPA projects.

With the lifting of embargoes on the shipment of military supplies to England and France, employment began to pick up. By the spring of 1940 we had embarked upon our own program of preparation for possible war, and some factories long closed reopened, and others started to expand. Eventually billions of public money was used to build new airplane plants, munitions factories and shipyards.

Many of these installations, of course, were located in small villages and some in the open country for reasons of military security. Workers were drawn to such places in increasing numbers, only to find, when they arrived, that either no housing for them existed, or that the existing housing was wholly inadequate. By midsummer of 1940 we were reading in our newspapers of workers and their families living in tents, in barns and in trailer camps, and of other workers commuting to their jobs in ancient jallopies from a distance of 40 or 50 miles. Lack of sanitary facilities was a menace to health and conditions rapidly became intolerable.

Congress acted to meet this housing problem in October of 1940 by enacting the so-called Lanham Act, which authorized the construction of housing by the Federal Government for defense workers in those areas where it could not, or would not, be provided by private capital. To carry out the program 150 million dollars was appropriated, a sum later increased from time to time up to a billion and a half.

This program was entrusted to the Administrator of the Federal Works Agency, which was logical enough, since the Agency had been created as the construction arm of the Government and was given responsibility for Federal building construction, Federal assistance in highway construction, for the low rental housing program of the United States Housing Authority, and for the vast public works enterprises represented by PWA and WPA.

When I became administrator of FWA in December 1941, shortly before Pearl Harbor, I found that, for a variety of reasons, the defense housing program was moving at a pace that seemed to me to be disappointingly leisurely For one thing, suburban "garden communities" were being designed in some cases which, while altogether admirable in concept, took a considerable amount of time to design and build. For another, a housing coordinator had been appointed to give effect to that provision of the law which contemplated that housing should be built by private capital if possible, and a good deal of time was expended in trying to persuade unwilling private interests to invest money in housing. And in the meantime, workers were still sleeping in tents and haystacks.

We immediately put the emphasis on speed, utilizing all the resources at our command, and cutting corners wherever possible. Among other things we contracted for the Nation's entire output of prefabricated houses.

In February 1942, the President created the National Housing Agency and transferred all matters relating to housing to it. By that time we had constructed some 60,000 dwelling units, including thousands at Army and Navy installations for the Armed Forces, most of which were then occupied. Our responsibility for housing then came to an end, and the remainder of the housing story can more properly be related by the National Housing Agency than by me.

It should be noted, however, that this housing program was not solely conceived of humanitarian motives. The truth was that it was essential to the efficient production of needed munitions and military equipment, and therefore vitally essential to the successful prosecution of the war. With workers trying to live in barns and tents productive efficiency declined. Even more serious was the alarming labor turnover. Few workers could be persuaded to remain on the job very long under such depressing living conditions.

It was soon found, however, that housing alone met only a part of the need. Houses are of little use until they have been connected with water and sewer systems, and in many of these places water and sewer systems simply did not exist. In crowded communities some provision also had to be made for such things as garbage removal and fire and police protection. What to do with the children of defense workers was another problem. In some places schools did not exist, or if they existed they already were crowded to capacity.

Congress recognized the imperative need for some of these necessities and amenities in June 1941, when it extended the scope of the Lanham Act to authorize the Federal Works Administrator to provide them, under certain specified conditions. The relevant language read, in part--

> "Whenever the President finds that in any area or locality an acute shortage of public works necessary to the health, safety, or welfare of persons engaged in national-defense activities exists or impends which would impede national defense activities, and that such public works or equipment cannot otherwise be provided when needed, or could not be provided without the imposition of an increased excessive tax burden or an unusually excessive increase in the debt limit of the taxing or borrowing authority in which such shortage exists, the Federal Works Administrator is authorized, with the approval of the President, in order to relieve such shortage"--

to do certain things; namely, to condemn land, to acquire and remodel buildings, to construct public works, to make grants of Federal funds to assist in the maintenance and operation of public works--and so on.

That's a mouthful of language, but you will note that before we could act, the President had to make a finding of need. Of course, the President himself could hardly be expected to go wandering around the country checking up on the situation. He issued a directive which assigned to various Federal agencies the responsibility for examining into the question of need and then certifying the facts to him. For example, if a new school house were in question, the United States Office of Education was to supply the certification. If a hospital were involved, the Public Health Service certified. If certain community facilities were needed in the vicinity of a shipyard, the Maritime Commission was to certify, as were the Army or the Navy in appropriate cases. The War Production Board also could certify need where the facility involved was considered of primary importance to war production.

This led, as you might well imagine, to a certain amount of confusion and delay. For example, the mayor and city council of a certain town would appeal to us for assistance in providing a new school, a hospital and an extension of its sewer lines to a new housing development. They would file an application and our regional director, who was close to the scene, would look the town over, or send somebody else to do it. If he concluded that the need really was critical and of importance in the war effort, he would accept the application and forward it to us here in Washington for approval.

But that didn't end the matter. We would then consult the other Federal agencies which were presumed to have an interest in the matter, and they would send their own experts to the town to make a survey in order to determine the need. So it might happen that the investigators of six different agencies would all be in the town at the same time, all looking into the same facts. Weeks, or even months, might elapse before the other agencies supplied their certifications and the project application could be forwarded to the President for his approval.

Even that did not end the matter. Materials of many kinds were in short supply, and the military, of necessity, had first call on critical items, especially metals. The War Production Board controlled the priorities and we had to go to that agency to beg for enough materials to build the project. And when we went to the War Production Board with our briefcases bulging with Certificates of Necessity from agencies A, B, C and D, and with the President's signature on the dotted line certifying the certifications, Mr. WPB would shrug his shoulders and ask, "Yes, but is this project really needed?"

Often, in vain we pointed to the Presidential signature. And then the WPB would send out its own investigators to ascertain the need all over again!

If you think that was a mighty awkward way to proceed in wartime, you would be exactly right. Fortunately, the system was corrected by the President in another directive which called upon the Administrator only to seek the recommendations of other agencies to the extent he thought fit, and left the final decision to the President and the Administrator, where the law had placed it in the first place. Other agencies could no longer tie the hands of the Administrator by vetoing needed projects or postponing their construction unduly.

Up until almost the end of the war, however, we were plagued by shortages of critical materials. We adopted a policy of erecting emergency-type structures, plain and unadorned, but sturdy enough, with the strictest economy in the use of metals. For example, we dispensed with elevators in hospitals in order to save metals. This necessitated the practice of building horizontally rather than vertically. This meant that the structures were spread around over a lot of acreage, and that was pretty hard on the doctors and nurses who had to do far more walking than is necessary in a multistory building equipped with elevators.

To save materials, we turned wherever possible to substitutes. In turn some of the substitutes also grew scarce, and we had to find substitutes for the substitutes. We used a good deal of secondhand materials. Our engineers became adept at pawing through the wreckage of buildings that were being dismantled in the hope that they could salvage something for use in one of our structures. Some of them got to be pretty accomplished scavengers.

One feature of the program which I think was particularly outstanding was the cooperation worked out between the Federal Works Agency and the United States Public Health Service for the attack on the venereal diseases. In our previous wars, as you know, the venereal diseases have taken an enormous toll of our fighting forces and incapacitated thousands of civilians for induction. In this war, I think I am safe in saying, the incidence of the venereal diseases dropped to the lowest point in any wartime experience. Formerly one obstacle to eradicating the menace was the inordinate length of time required to treat and cure the afflicted. That obstacle had been largely overcome by the development of new therapeutic techniques whereby syphilis and gonorrhea could be cured, or at least satisfactorily treated, within a few days. Public Health applied the treatment while we provided the hospitals and granted funds for maintenance and operation. Several State health departments also cooperated. The hospitals were built principally near military camps in the southern States, although one very successful operation was conducted in Chicago to which thousands of soldiers and sailors resorted to spend their leave. The patients for the most part were infected women who had been tracked down by the military. To the extent possible in the circumstances an attempt also was made to train these women for some sort of useful work and to help them obtain decent jobs upon their discharge. The fight against the venereal diseases is an interesting story which I cannot go into at greater length now. Sometime you might wish to have someone from Public Health come over and tell you more about it.

The large-scale unemployment that existed at the start of the war soon turned into an actual labor shortage. It soon became clear that WPA had served its purpose and in December 1942, I recommended to the President that it be given its honorable discharge. By Executive order, WPA was terminated as of the following June 30. However, for the last two or three years of its existence, WPA's projects generally were of a character to assist in military preparedness, and some of those projects were taken over and completed by the Army and Navy. WPA project workers built hundreds of airports, built or remodeled hundreds of buildings at army camps and naval stations, and after Pearl Harbor assisted in the fortification of the West Coast. Women project workers made barrack bags, repaired uniforms, and made articles of various kinds for Army use.

The womanpower shortage grew as did the manpower shortage. It became especially acute in the nursing profession. Younger qualified nurses entered the military service in large numbers leaving an inadequate force behind to take care of the sick at home. Congress sought to meet this problem by means of the Bolton Act, which authorized the Public Health Service to assist in the financing of training of cadet nurses. But then a difficulty arose in the fact that a great many schools of nursing, or hospitals capable of training nurses, lacked space and facilities. Fortunately, the provision of such facilities could very appropriately be financed with Lanham Act funds and we built some 240 projects in aid to nursing education, including dormitories for students, classrooms, laboratories, and dining halls.

And then, as the war proceeded, manufacturers were seen scraping the bottom of the manpower barrel. There was no other source of labor supply to turn to except womanpower. Most of the single women were seen at work and many young married women were recruited. But many of the latter had young children for whom some provision had to be made while the mothers were at work. Some, of course, had relatives with whom they could leave the children. Others asked neighbors to "keep an eye" on the youngsters during working hours. Still other children were permitted to roam the streets. Here, again, there was a serious labor turnover, for not many of these young mothers would remain on the job very long when they were worried about the safety of their children. The problem was critical from the manufacturer's standpoint because, after he had gone to the expense of training one group of women workers he had no assurance that they would stay on the job more than a few weeks, after which he had to go through the same expensive process all over again.

It was obvious that the woman-labor problem could not be satisfactorily solved until some orderly arrangement had been made for the care of the children. The Federal Works Agency accepted the responsibility and established hundreds of child-care centers where the youngsters could be left during the day under proper supervision. Most of these centers were established in the schools with the cooperation of local boards of education, Federal Works paying about two-thirds of the cost and the mothers paying small uniform fees, sufficient at least to cover the cost of the food consumed. One thing leads to another, especially in wartime. These working mothers had still another problem in trying to find food for their families after working hours. Usually there was little left in the stores by the time they were through work, and often they had to make long trips to secure even that little. We next gave thought to setting up some commissaries near the child-care centers so that the mothers could save steps by collecting their children and their groceries in one operation. We did embark on a few of these projects shortly before the war ended.

I said earlier that in the vast industrial expansion that began with the defense program, many new factories were built in small towns and even in the open country. One such establishment was set up in the midst of a grove of scrub pine in Tennessee. It appeared that a brand new town was growing up there by the name of Oak Ridge. The Army seemed especially interested in the place and we kept getting applications for projects of various sorts, including schools. We not only built the schools but we had to finance their operation after they were built. And not only that, but the funds needed for operation at Oak Ridge were far in excess of the sums required by other schools.

So, on 3 August 1945, one of our officials, Pere Seward by name, thought it was about time to call a halt, or at least have a logical explanation for those rising costs. He called up General Persons and asked for an interview. The General said he would be glad to see Pere

the following Monday, 6 August at two o'clock in the afternoon. This seemed a little unusual as the two men were very good friends, and generally when Pere had asked to see the General he was told, "Sure, come on over right away."

Nevertheless, Pere waited until 6 August and just as he was starting out to keep the appointment he happened to catch sight of the first page of the afternoon paper.

He hurried back to his own office, called General Persons, and weakly said, "Excuse it, please." The General laughed. "You see now," he said, "why I asked you not to come until two o'clock this afternoon."

I do not want to bother you with many statistics, but a few will help to illustrate the scope of the wartime public works operation.

We constructed some 4,000 projects, including 1,149 schools, 874 hospitals, 459 water projects, 446 sewer systems or parts of sewer systems, 726 recreation centers, and lesser numbers of police and fire stations and other facilities. The total construction cost was around 456 million dollars of which FWA furnished 359 million and the applicants, or benefiting communities, 97 million.

In each case every effort was made to obtain as large a contribution as possible from the benefiting community. But most of them were small towns and cities in which the population had quickly grown far beyond the local capacity to finance the needed facilities. In many cases, also, the Federal Government had come in and taken over large tracts of land, thus removing it from the tax rolls and still further reducing the ability of the local governments to finance the needed works. In some instances, the communities were unable or unwilling to pay any part of the cost. If the project was needed for the successful prosecution of the war, we built it anyway, entirely at Federal expense, and kept title to it in the name of the Government. About 180 million dollars was spent on these so-called Federal projects. We are now trying to dispose of them to the best advantage of the Government and already have recovered more than 20 million dollars through the sale of such properties. Usually, of course, the only possible purchaser is the local school board or the local government.

We spent nearly 397 million dollars in grants for the maintenance and operation of public works. Of that sum, 274 million went to help out in regular school operations and 76 million for child care. Lesser amounts were spent for hospital operation, to help support police and fire departments, for garbage removal, and for other necessary services.

Projects were built and operated in every state in the Union, although the heaviest concentration was in the Gulf States and on the Pacific coast.

At first glance it may seem that all this added up to a public works program of rather staggering proportions. The actual fact is that it was a mere drop in the bucket. It amounted to an average of around 90 million dollars annually for the war years, compared to a normal prewar expenditure for public works of from two to three billion dollars.

Construction and operation of Federal buildings is another function of the Federal Works Agency, as is the administration of Federal highway legislation. The regular building program came to a halt, except for the construction of temporary office space for expanding war agencies--the so-called "tempos" which you see scattered around Washington. The residence halls for Government girls at Arlington Farms was another FWA project, and it is still being operated by our Public Buildings Administration.

Road building and maintenance, except for portions of the strategic network and access roads to military and industrial establishments and to mines and other sources of needed raw materials, was at a standstill all during the war.

So you see, we have accumulated an enormous deficit in public works over the last five or six years, and the absence of these facilities represents a part of the hardship which the war inflicted on the civilian population. Billions of dollars worth of new schools, hospitals, water and sewer systems, highways, reclamation and flood control works, postoffices and other needed public buildings, which would have been built in the normal course of events if there had been no war, remain to be built. We are at least half a decade behind schedule in the work of providing the public conveniences and amenities which the people of the country need.

Even yet we are not in a position to do much about overcoming the deficit. Congress has authorized an expenditure of a billion and a half dollars for highway work over a three-year period, a sum to be matched equally by the States and representing a total program to cost three billion dollars. But prices are high, many contractors' bids are being rejected, so that this work is not proceeding at the anticipated rate. The normal public building program is still being held in abeyance in order to avoid competition with housing for men and materials. Housing, and especially housing for our veterans, is recognized as the greater national construction need at the moment. Such local public works as are being built are mostly in the form of streets, sidewalks, water and sewer work needed to supplement the housing program.

But while public works construction is far behind schedule, some notable progress is being made in the detailed planning of projects. We have been authorized by Congress to make repayable advances of funds

to the States and local communities to help pay for the preparation of working drawings and specifications. For this purpose 65 million dollars have been appropriated—sufficient we believe, to finance the preparation of construction to cost more than two billion dollars. That is less than one year's normal State and local public work. It is not enough. And unfortunately all the available funds will have been allotted before 30 June, when our authority to make such advances will expire unless extended by Congress.

We had hoped that the plans for these projects could be saved until a depression is threatened so that much needed employment would be available and the construction industry could be better stabilized. But some of the planned projects already are being built, so that our work reserve is steadily dwindling and not being replenished.

We won a great victory over our enemies abroad, but at enormous cost in lives, in suffering, in dollars, in economic dislocations, and in a dearth of facilities for education, the treatment of the sick, and those common amenities which modern society requires. Some of these effects will be felt for many long years to come.

The moral is: Let's not have any more wars.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

Does anyone have a question he would like to ask?

A STUDENT OFFICER:

General McKinley, in the event of a more total war than the last one, with perhaps bombing and damage being done in this country, could you briefly outline if a Federal Works Agency could take care of bomb repairs? What would be essential for that?

GENERAL FLEMING:

That is something that has been puzzling me for some time. I really do not know. As a matter of fact, this last week I conducted a conference, the President's conference, on fire prevention. I had representatives of the Army down there. I thought maybe they could give me some pointers as to what we might do; but, so far, I have not been able to determine anything.

The Federal Works Agency, I might point out, is set up to go in and rebuild cities, if necessary. We have the technicians to handle all phases of that kind of work.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

As presently organized, is the Federal Works Agency in a position to operate in a new emergency?

GENERAL FLEMING:

Yes, it is. I think we are especially well fitted because we are almost completely decentralized. We have nine regional offices. We have offices in every State in the Union--in roads, in buildings and in community facilities. They are all located in such a way that they can work together. I think they could start off any time.

They all have plenty of authority to go ahead. I remember back in the days when I was going to Garrison School and studying Field Service Regulations, there was a sentence in the regulations which said when a man was given responsibilities he should also be given authority commensurate with those responsibilities. That has always been my theory of organization. So our field staffs do have the authority. They have responsibilities and they have the authority.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

From your experience in the war, what solution could you suggest for the present housing shortage? Could you suggest anything, specifically?

GENERAL FLEMING:

Well, during the war the experience I had with housing was only in connection with temporary housing. The housing shortage now cannot be overcome with temporary structures. It has to be overcome by permanent structures.

I do not know just what we could do at the present time because the housing program, which would take care of the needs today, is being held up principally on account of high prices. The individual cannot afford to pay, or have saddled around his neck, a debt of $10,000 for a $5,000 or $6,000 house.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

From your many years of experience in building, I think you will agree that this housing situation, the building trades industry in this country, is not a very healthy one. There are various restrictions, unionisms, etc. Now what will it take to clean them up, in your opinion?

GENERAL FLEMING:

Well, I hate to say so, but I think the only thing that can clean them up is some sort of a recession. They can all get plenty of work now. A man engaged in any of the house-building trades has no trouble to find work. He does not have much trouble keeping his job.

I think one of the major causes raising the cost of these buildings is the nonproductivity of the worker. He is not producing what he could. If he had to hold the particular job he is on by producing, he could produce a whole lot more than he is doing now. For example, a bricklayer, instead of laying a thousand bricks a day, lays 400. I saw one not so long ago working on a porch for a friend of mine. He would lay some bricks for a while, then he would go off and sit under the tree for an hour and smoke his pipe and read his paper, and then he would come back again. He stayed there for the full day's work. I asked him why he did that. He said, "The only way I can lay bricks is to lay them fast. I can lay about 1200 a day. But," he said, "I am limited to four hundred a day. So I lay them fast, then I rest, then I go and lay them just as fast again."

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

General Fleming, you might be interested in a remark which was made here just the other day. The wife of this officer was out in California, modernizing a house. The plasterers were getting $50.00 a day out there.

GENERAL FLEMING:

That sounds high.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

It was not the going rate, but they were bidding for them at $50.00 a day.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

From the point of view of the coordination of authority, do you feel that housing should come under your control in the future?

GENERAL FLEMING:

Yes, I do.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

Would you want the financial aspects of it also?

GENERAL FLEMING:

I do not want the Federal Housing Authority which guarantees mortgage loans for private builders. I do not think that should be under

FWA because we are a building organization. But I do think that any housing built by the Federal Government should be under FWA.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

Will you comment on the desirability of the FWA, in time of war, being placed under the "super" emergency organization, for co-ordination?

GENERAL FLEMING:

I do not think I know enough about it. If such an organization is to be set up FWA certainly should be under it for coordination purposes.

Now I assume that that would take the place of the President. We had to go to him for coordination during the war. This is, I suppose, a step between some place down below him. I used to have to go to President Roosevelt to get him to sign his name on all sorts of projects, which always seemed perfectly silly, busy as he was with far more important matters.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

General Fleming, in your organization, do you have a division that approves the designs of the different public works?

GENERAL FLEMING:

No, we do not approve the designs. We have authority to make advances for planning to the communities. That money is given to them without interest and is to be returned to the Federal Treasury when they get their first construction money available.

We assure ourselves that there is a need for the work and that the community has, or will have, the financial ability to finance its construction. Then, in addition, we assure ourselves that it has the proper people to design the project. We would not advance money for any fly-by-night engineering or architectural firm to step in and do the work.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

In the work that you do, what leeway do you have, if any, in waiving Federal specifications for your own material?

GENERAL FLEMING:

We have very little. You are talking now about Federal buildings?

A STUDENT OFFICER:

Yes, sir.

GENERAL FLEMING:

Fortunately, during the war we were given an appropriation of a half million dollars to make research into public building construction. We had some very capable people on that. We spent considerable time with these people in drawing up very general specifications which we could turn over to architects or engineers who are designing public buildings, and to the contractors who build them, which gives them a good deal more leeway than they ever had in the past.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

General Fleming, that modified Lanham Act permitted you to build these day nurseries and hospitals and things of that kind. Now, as I understand it, they wrote into that your ability to finance their operation.

GENERAL FLEMING:

That is correct.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

Was not that an entirely new function for you? I mean for your agency. You were a building agency.

GENERAL FLEMING:

Yes, that was an entirely new function. It so happens we were the only agency of Government that had the funds for that purpose. That did not modify the Lanham Act. It was simply an interpretation of the Lanham Act and the day nursery was looked on as a type of public work.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

But not its operation.

GENERAL FLEMING:

Yes. We were authorized in the original Lanham Act to provide money for the maintenance and operation of public works.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

And they considered that was a public work.

GENERAL FLEMING:

That is right. It is a little devious, but that was the way it was handled.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

Actually, the manufacture of a uniform, the way we have them manufactured, is a public work.

GENERAL FLEMING:

That is right.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

Most people do not understand that definition. But where the material is supplied by the Government and someone does the work on it, it becomes a public work. That is the way with the uniforms.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

This is digressing some I know, but in your present job as OTC, would you tell us what is going to be left when you liquidate? What is going to happen to all of the records, and so on?

GENERAL FLEMING:

I am fast getting out of this. The middle of last December the President issued an Executive order creating the Office of Temporary Controls and made me the Administrator. It included in it the old OPA and the CPA (which was a descendant of WPB), the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion and the Office of Economic Stabilization. All of them would have passed out of existence by June without some legislation.

The OWMR and OES are very easy. I combined them into one small unit. They are gone now. That has been liquidated.

The CPA had very little left except a program for controlling the construction of nonresidential buildings. That was really its most important function, although it did have control over certain things, such as rubber, antimony, streptomycin, and some other things which were in short supply. The CPA function of control over nonresidential construction has been turned over to the Housing Expediter. It is no longer in OTC. Its functions in regard to the control of these various short-supply materials are going to the Department of Commerce at the end of this month.

In OPA, the main things left were sugar, rice and rent control. Sugar and rice have already been transferred to the Department of Agriculture. Rent control, I am happy to say, is no longer with me. It has been transferred also to the Housing Expediter.

The liquidation of what is left is being turned over to the Department of Commerce. They will no longer be in O.T.C. after June 1st.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

Can you tell us where the records and histories will all go?

GENERAL FLEMING:

It is pretty hard, at the present time, to say. We are going through our records, setting aside what is really needed. It will take quite a job of editing, over a period of years. It will require a congressional appropriation in order to do that work. In the meantime, the records will be placed in the custody of the Archives until the work can be done. But there are, of course, some very valuable records in OPA and in CPA; recor which will be of value to you here.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

Is Commerce getting some of that historical section?

GENERAL FLEMING:

Commerce is getting some of that historical section, but they have no personnel to carry on.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

That is what I understand. They can not continue their employment.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

We have all heard quite a bit about the antiquated building codes in various parts of the country. Did your outfit have to abide by those loca building codes? Is anything being done to either nationalize or to rectif those antiquated codes?

GENERAL FLEMING:

No. We paid no attention to the local codes in our Federal construction. We got into some hot fights, at one time or another, over that But I recall a school out near Chicago where, if we had followed the local building codes, we would have had to put in five times the number of toile we put into that schools. Yet, the number we put in would have satisfied the building codes in 37 of the States of this Union. That was a case , o course, where the plumbing supply men had had a hand in writing the buildi code. But we paid no attention--and we do not to the local codes in connection with Federal construction, any place.

In so far as building codes, generally, are concerned, I doubt very much if the Federal Government could impose building codes on State or political subdivisions of States. I spoke about this Fire Prevention Conference, which I held last week, called by the President. One of the things we stressed there was uniform building codes all over the United States. Our committee suggested codes which should be enacted by the States, by the cities, the townships, and others. Of course, the only

purpose of a code is to protect the life and health of the occupants of the building, but sometimes codes are criminally lax in that, as the Wynecoff Hotel fire in Atlanta bears witness. Sometimes they are unduly restrictive, as in the case of the one school I mentioned out near Chicago.

But this Fire Prevention Committee is going to recommend standard building codes which, we hope, will be accepted throughout the Nation. They have to be accepted by local bodies; they cannot be superimposed.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

How much did political pressure affect your program during the war?

GENERAL FLEMING:

None. When President Roosevelt appointed me to this job, I told him I was an Army officer on active duty; I was not identified as a Democrat or as a Republican; the only condition under which I would take the job would be that I could run it entirely nonpolitical; that I was not going to inquire as to the politics of any man I hired. He said that was the way he wanted me to run it. When Mr. Truman became President, I went over and told him that unless I could do it that way, I would prefer to get out. He said, "That is exactly the way I want you to run it." So, there are no politics in FWA.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

Looking toward a future emergency, is your office or any government agency studying the development of a semipermanent, mobile, self-contained house that could be moved from one section of the country to another so that you could move a large population from one section to another?

GENERAL FLEMING:

We are not doing it. It is possible it might be under study in the National Housing Agency. You see, we have no housing functions at the present time. Unless a bill is passed shortly, something like the Wagner-Ellender-Taft bill, to make permanent the National Housing Agency, the U.S. Housing Authority, which was in FWA, will come back to FWA.

A STUDENT OFFICER:

General Fleming, what difficulties did you have with labor supply in FWA during the war? What are your views as to the necessity for national service in another war?

GENERAL FLEMING:

Well, actually, we did not have a great deal of trouble with labor supply. I had in my organization a man by the name of Kirkpatrick, who

was an old AFL building-trades-man, and highly respected by organized labor We had cases where the Carpenters Union paid the expenses of carpenters to travel from the Middle West out to a job we had in the San Diego area in order to give us sufficient labor to do the work.

We had no labor troubles at all, no strikes, nothing of any kind. The only riffle was down at Shreveport, Louisiana, where we were going to build a recreation center. Our law required that, in hiring labor for Lanham Act projects, there should be no discrimination because of race, creed or color. So we looked into the situation down there and found that there were a certain number of qualified negro carpenters. We told the mayor they would have to work on that job. He said he would not have negro carpenters work on anything. I said, "All right; we do not construct the building." And we never did, either.

But it may be that mobilization will have to be so great, in another conflict, that we would have to go to national service all the day through, as Britain did. But it was not necessary, in so far as we were concerned, in this war.

GENERAL MCKINLEY:

I want to say you have disclosed a characteristic here that, I think, is rather unique in a public administrator, and that is you have the ability to go out of business.

We want to thank you very much, sir, for coming down here and giving us this great, stimulating talk. Thank you.

(6 June 1947--350)S.