

BUILDING THE RAVENNA ORDNANCE PLANT

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A JOB HISTORY



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Edited by LORRAINE LEPERE McDOWELL

DEDICATION

Abroad in the world today is the absurd notion that Americans are smug, soft and lazy. That the American workingman is none of these is proved by the fact that what we have built at Ravenna stands an everlasting monument to American ingenuity, talent, wisdom and industry. No major construction attempted in recent years has shown a better record for speed or achievement.

But no one man built Ravenna—it has been from the beginning too big for that. It's not the engineer, not the carpenter boss, not the swivel-chair man—even though each made his contribution. It's every man who worked in any capacity on this lot—it's the thousands and thousands of hands and hearts and minds all bent in one direction—doing the job.

Therefore to John Doe, builder of the Ravenna Ordnance Plant and Depot, we faithfully dedicate this volume.



COL. RAPHAEL S. CHAVIN Ordnance Department

MILITARY HISTORY

Corp. and Sgt., Texas Nat'l. Guard, 7/24/16 to 3/21/17 2nd and 1st Lt., Coast Artillery Corps, 3/22/17 Capt., CAC, 11/5/17 Transfer to Ordnance Dept., 5/7/20 Major, Ordnance, 5/20/30 Lt. Col., Ordnance, 8/1/39 Col., Ordnance, 10/18/41

AEF — 7/30/18 to 6/17/19 — including duty as Commanding Officer 54th Artillery Train

Small Arms Production Chief, Frankfort Arsenal — 1923 to 1929 Chief of Field Service, Washington — 1931 to 1934

Chief of Ordnance, Picatinny Arsenal — 1936 to 1940

Commanding Officer, Ravenna Ordnance Plant, 10/29/40

Commanding Officer, Ravenna Ordnance Depot, 12/13/40

Constructing Quartermaster, Ravenna Ordnance Plant—12/31/40

Constructing Quartermaster, Ravenna Ordnance Depot—1/18/41

Graduated from Cornell with an AB in chemical engineering, Col. Chavin also took an MBA at Harvard, and pursued higher studies at both the Army Industrial College, and Army Ordnance School at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

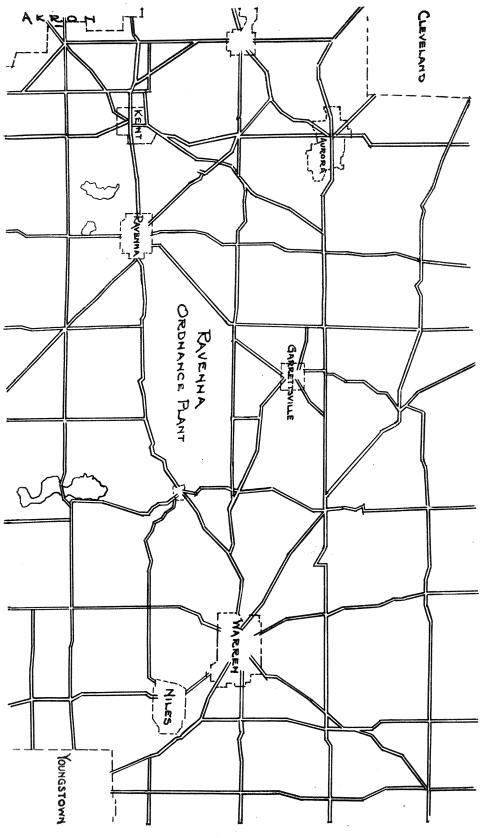
As the story of Ravenna unfolds in this volume, Col. Chavin's tremendous contribution to the success of this project will become increasingly plainer. It suffices for now to say that guiding the Ravenna Ordnance Plant and Depot from a \$12,000,000 giant into a \$57,000,000 gargantua obviously required the talent of an executive with wisdom, foresight and personality. This we had in Col. Chavin, a munitions expert of national reputation, whose great ability to take in stride the problems of a job constantly expanding was a fortunate circumstance for which all concerned will never cease to be grateful.

FOREWORD

The story of Ravenna as told in the pages to follow can well be lost in a myriad of figures and statistics, staggering in size and amounts, but each in its own columns proving its point in establishing the Ravenna Ordnance Plant and Depot as one of the greatest feats of design and construction ever done by man in such a short period of time. All of the details incident to the performance of the various agencies involved can never be recorded. A fast moving panorama would have to include a Sunday in late August, 1940, talking to the farmers who overnight were given thirty days to vacate farms, some of which had never changed title since the days of the Connecticut Land Grants; surveyors taking over the school house in Windham and setting up temporary plotting rooms, field engineers waiting for the day of legal right of entry to go forth into the 24,000 acres to take topography; the contractor's office set up in a farmhouse with one outgoing country telephone line so jammed with incoming calls that no service to the outside was possible, hundreds of salesmen packed around the farmyard trying to see someone who wanted to place orders for something which might be used later, if good guessing could so help hasten the construction when plans could be produced; plans of the camp buildings, dormitories and commissary of Shasta Dam in northern California being rushed by air mail to be used at Ravenna to save time; wells being sunk for water supply; buyers going to the World's Fair in New York to purchase equipment for the dining rooms and kitchens from concessions closing up; lumber being rushed by car from every available source, trucks hauling lumber from Akron, Youngstown, Cleveland and finally Pittsburgh as available stocks became depleted; rails being torn up in Maryland and shipped post haste to Ravenna as new material could not be waited for; thirty miles of existing secondary roads being resurfaced in twenty-six days to beat the oncoming winter; rebuilding farm houses to take care of the women stenographers and telephone operators; rush orders for tractors, scrapers, road building equipment, cranes and shovels, trucks; the first inkling that rock existed in the cuts for the railroads and load lines, rush orders for air compressors and drills, then more shovels and more of everything, then quicksand and the rush for pile driving equipment to support railroad tracks and storage buildings; the first visit of Col. Groves from Washington and the hopeless condition of the fields and roads knee deep in mud; the decision to enter the bogged areas with narrow gauge railroad, the rush for dinky locomotives from the completed Pennsylvania Turnpike Tunnels, the day the first concrete traversed the railroads with truck mixers mounted on flat cars and transferred their charges to the narrow gauge tracks and into the swamps on the dinky cars; the first snow and cold weather, the hundreds of oil stoves and thousands of tarpaulins, the twenty-four hours every day in snow, rain and freezing weather with never an hour lost all winter; not one yard of concrete frozen; the roads impassable, rock from the railroad and load line excavations piled into the muddy road bottoms, thousands of tons of slag by truck from Youngstown; the gradual rise out of the bog with new roads daily coming into being; the winning fight with nature becoming more apparent each day; the hunt for locomotives to haul our incoming materials; the camp completed, the dormitories filled to capacity and more new ones started; the problem of transporting men from the camp area to the ever widening scope of new construction; the broadcasting system for dispatching and governing the movements of 16,000 men; the first special trains from Akron and Youngstown, the railroad wreck in March with the finest piece of relief work and evacuation of wounded ever recorded; the ever recurring collection of money for some unfortunate's family, the spirit of cooperation and mutual interest in one man for the other; the strikes, the adverse publicity, the black eye of Ravenna in the minds of Washington; the business agents, the demands for higher wages, the gradual return of labor peace, the quiet, consistent and unstoppable progress of the construction; the rumors of other plants being ready to load shells before Ravenna, the day the first load line went into production and never stopped, the fact that Ravenna after all was the first plant to load; the scarcity of materials, the priorities, the expeditors to all corners of the country; the Navy and small arms plants commanding our materials by higher priorities; the distribution of the thousands of items to the places where they were needed over an area of thirty square miles; the ever increasing expansion of the plant and its facilities; waiting and waiting for plans to be drawn, checked and blueprinted; the handling of sub-contracts; the organization of constantly increasing gangs and crews; the almost self-organized athletic teams, the sign painters bank, the orchestra, the Ravenna Ordnance Plant players with their own little theatre in the Bolton Horse Barn; the Flag Day parade in the town of Ravenna with floats passing for four straight hours while hot rivets were being driven and logs sawed on the main street of Ravenna; the trade dinners in the commissary; the bricklayers and the ironworkers on each other's tails and the rivalry between all trades and the pride of the worker in his own profession; the complete abolition of labor troubles from the daily program of effort to get the plant built; the clambake, the kidnapping of the bartender; the pool games and bar in the recreation room; the lay-off period and the diminishing of forces finally arriving, the exodus of men to who knows where; the Fuze & Booster weekly paper; the boomtown camp at the plant entrance, the trailer camps, the good record of off work behavior reported by police in surrounding towns; the interest and constant efforts of Col. Chavin toward morale among the men, Mrs. Chavin's tireless efforts to make the life on the reservation pleasant for the workers' wives; the ever improving spirit of making the job at Ravenna pleasant and one never to

be forgotten; the flag raising in every work area; the martial music on the broadcasting system; the 5,000 miles of construction telephone lines for regulation of construction and railroad operation, the pleasant voices of the telephone girls with never a sharp retort; the self-organized efficiency in all departments with every department chief free to use his ingenuity to improve his organization; the drive of tireless Jim Bartholomew, his superintendents' meetings with the lash of his tongue tempered with wit and wise cracks, Mutt and Jeff and every day a new goat; the stealing of tractors and cranes by the night foremen from under the eyes of one who dropped his vigilance for even one hour; the shortage of pick-up trucks, in fact the shortage of everything to keep the growing giant properly fed; finally the transfer of Col. Chavin and the other ranking officers, giving due notice that the end was not far off and that one of the greatest organizations of men in the history of construction was about to be dissipated and scattered to other fields and the end had come to a relationship and comradeship never to be forgotten by all who were fortunate enough to be a part of it. All of us will leave with the personal satisfaction that a good job was done here in the interest of our national defense. Hours and remuneration of our efforts here were secondary to doing what was entrusted to each of us and seeing that it was done regardless of personal sacrifice. We had a job to do and we have done it and it was all done the hard way. Every-day jobs will seem easy to those who go back to normal ways of doing things and each of us will take away from Ravenna more than he had when he came. We have left behind us the mark of our handiwork and efforts of which we can be proud.

S. E. HUNKIN





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THE HUNKIN-CONKEY CONSTRUCTION CO.

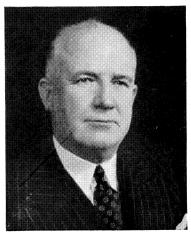
Executive Management



S. E. HUNKIN Vice President



G. E. CONKEY, SR. President



C. A. LOHMILLER Vice President



G. E. CONKEY, JR. General Superintendent



J. L. ERWIN Secretary



H. F. HADDE Chief Engineer

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