

The Role of TVA During WWII

During the era of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the New Deal was cause for great celebration and much needed jobs in rural East Tennessee. During this time period, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was called upon to erect the first dam in the TVA system.

The site for this dam was Norris, TN. One of two cities in Anderson County built by the federal government, Norris began as a planned community developed by TVA in 1933 to house the workers building Norris Dam. Approximately 2,900 families were displaced from reservoir lands during construction. Later, the homes were purchased by the town's residents, and the town was incorporated in 1949.

Norris Dam is a hydroelectric and flood-control structure located on the Clinch River. Designed by architect Roland Wank, construction on the dam began in October 1933 and was completed in March 1936. The project cost \$36 million.

The enormous amount of power needed to fuel the production of nuclear materials was one of the reasons the Manhattan Project site in Oak Ridge was built where it was. Nuclear-materials production was both delicate and potentially dangerous. It required plenty of fresh water for cooling and a place that was not in danger of flooding.



For three years, the Manhattan Project site in Oak Ridge used millions of kilowatts of TVA energy. Not even the TVA chairman knew this until August 1945, when the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war.

The electricity provided by Norris Dam, sixteen miles upstream from Oak Ridge, helped to run the facilities in Oak Ridge for the Manhattan Project. But that wasn't the only role TVA played during WWII.

In 1935, TVA's chairman, Arthur Morgan, testified before Congress that "an adequate supply of electric energy comes pretty close to being a matter of

national defense." Over the next six years, TVA geared up its energy capacity to be ready in the event of war.

During the war, TVA's contributions began with its mapping department, based in Chattanooga, Tennessee. This department used aerial reconnaissance and techniques perfected in the course of mapping the Tennessee Valley to make crucial maps of Europe for Allied aviators. In addition, the TVA nitrate plants in Alabama supplied the raw material needed for thousands of tons of munitions.

The main contribution of TVA, however, was the huge amount of electric power it provided to customers during the war, including an A-31 bomber factory located in Nashville, Tennessee. Another TVA customer located in Alcoa, Tennessee, just south of Knoxville, was the Aluminum Company of America, the largest aluminum plant in the world which was used to provide aluminum for the 50,000 planes that President Roosevelt demanded in May 1940 for the air force. In 1941, Alcoa gave its Fontana property to the federal government and ten days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, a bill was signed authorizing the construction of Fontana Dam. Soon after that, TVA launched the construction of two more dams, Cherokee and Douglas. Their roles were also to support the wartime production of aluminum.