



# THE

# SPOILS OF WAR

The world clamored to obtain Germany's industrial and scientific assets after World War II. But sometimes, the booty wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

Two months after World War II officially ended, an American engineering team examining German industrial sites for possible war reparations discovered one of the most coveted trophies of the defeated nation.

Still intact in the American Zone near Frankfurt, Germany, was the Klöckner-Humboldt-Deutz (KHD) research laboratory, considered one of the top diesel engine research facilities in the world. Its value in U.S. currency was estimated between \$1 and \$3 million.

The specialized lab was quickly slated for removal to the United States, partly because the U.S. hoped to acquire German scientific and technical advances and partly to keep it out of the hands of the Russians.

The American military hired German laborers to dismantle and crate the expensive precision equipment, paying them with coal to heat their homes and food scraps from military mess halls. Within a few months the dismantled lab was shipped to the Camden Quartermaster Warehouse in Alexandria, Va.

## MECHANICAL CHALLENGES

Meanwhile, OAMC President Henry G. Bennett and engineering dean Col. Phillip S. Donnell, a veteran of the war, were working to bring additional resources to campus.

When they learned that the KHD lab, described as "a complete, modern research laboratory of great size," would be awarded to an American university, OAMC became one of more than 100 institutions to bid on it.

Oklahoma A&M's proposal in September 1947 included the construction of a 26,000-square-foot building within six months, an annual appropriation of \$150,000 for five years and construction of a permanent facility for the lab.

In March of 1948 the U.S. Department of Commerce, in cooperation with the U.S. Office of Education, announced the lab would be awarded to OAMC, where Stillwater's strategic distance from "vulnerable coastal areas" was deemed favorable.

Originally known as the Diesel lab, it was quickly renamed the Oklahoma Power and Propulsion Laboratory and arrived in Stillwater via three Southern Railroad freight cars on April 3, 1948. The 72 crates of equipment weighing 65 tons were guarded at a temporary location around the clock until OAMC's new facility on the northeast corner of campus opened six months later on Oct. 25, 1948.

Almost immediately, problems were discovered. Minor damages incurred during packing and shipping were expected, as well as rust damage from the three years of storage. But as the unpacking continued, other challenges emerged. Twenty boxes listed on the inventory never arrived. Most electric motors had been removed or were severely damaged, and much of the instrumentation was missing. Almost everything that remained would require overhauling and recalibrating.

Donnell wrote to Bennett in February 1949 that it "proved not to be quite as pictured and as certified by the individual responsible for packing in Germany," and "the publicity about the fabulous German apparatus is largely a fiction." What remained was valued at only \$150,000, and the college invested almost \$100,000 more to bring it into working condition.

## PERSONNEL PROBLEMS

Part of OAMC's proposal included hiring a separate scientific and support staff under the guidance of a national advisory committee. In September 1948, OAMC hired Walter Scott Burn, an international authority in diesel research from England, to be director, and recruited

Otto A. Becker, one of the lab's top assistants in Germany, to coordinate the lab's reassembly.

Donnell hoped Becker could join the OAMC team as the chief experimenter in time for the grand opening a month later in October. Initial contacts with the U.S. State Department implied an efficient immigration process. However, this also proved to be an exaggeration.

Another year passed as they worked through the morass of emigration and exit permits, visas, protocols, travel arrangements, and even then, Becker arrived without his fiancé in December 1949.

During this time, Burn traveled around the country attempting to initiate contracts from government agencies and corporations to underwrite the lab's work.

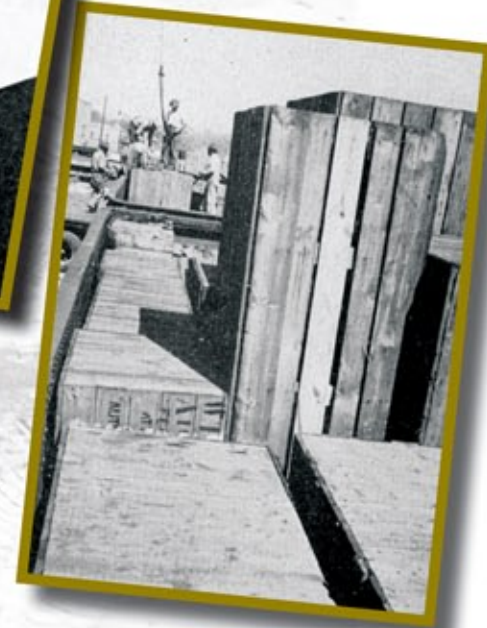
Burn also battled the college business office over appropriations. Although considered a separate research entity, the lab depended on the college for the initial start-up costs, which had been much higher than originally budgeted. Growing resistance to the program continued, even within the School of Engineering, and state revenues were declining.

With the unexpected death of President Bennett in 1951 and Donnell's 1955 retirement following a three-year leave of absence, the Oklahoma Power and Propulsion Laboratory could not survive without its two strongest champions. It ceased to exist on Feb. 15, 1955.

A few staff relocated on campus, including future college vice president James H. Boggs, but most left. Surviving equipment from the "world-renown" lab was integrated into the existing engineering research labs.

All that remains today are the memories stored in 24 boxes of office documents shipped to the OSU library 55 years ago. **O**

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The Southern Railroad delivered three freight cars loaded with 72 crates of German lab equipment to Stillwater on April 3, 1948. The 65 tons of equipment broke several hoists and chains during the short trip from the rail yard to the OAMC campus. At first the Russians were blamed for some of the missing equipment because they had dismantled the accompanying factories nearby, but years later it was discovered that some of the equipment had been removed by the Germans and ended up in Austria. Others items apparently disappeared in transit and at the shipyards in Virginia.