



The Broad Gate entrance to the Defense Supply Center Columbus provides an interesting contrast to the entrance (top inset) as it stood in 1938. The seven-story office for DLA Land and Maritime (bottom inset) serves as Defense Supply Center Columbus' main operations center.

## DEFENSE SUPPLY CENTER COLUMBUS

# 100 YEARS OF WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

Compiled by Craig Rader  
DLA Land and Maritime Public Affairs  
Photos Courtesy DLA Land and Maritime

**F**or 100 years, a small military post in central Ohio has played a major role supporting U.S. servicemen and women around the world. On May 4, the Defense Supply Center Columbus — home to Defense Logistics Agency Land and Maritime — celebrates its centennial and recognizes a century of warfighter support from thousands of military and civilian personnel over the decades.

In 1917, the site was a combination of undeveloped swamps and tracts of

farmland 5 miles east of downtown Columbus — a considerable distance at the time. But its location was an asset. Ohio's capital city was within 500 miles of most of the nation's manufacturing centers, where military supplies and equipment were produced.

The city itself had become a major Midwestern rail hub and a military center during the Civil War and into the 1900s. During the Mexican border conflicts in 1916, the Columbus Barracks, built in 1905, was one of five posts that supplied the Army through the Jeffersonville Quartermaster Depot in Indiana.

In the early 1900s, Columbus boasted one of the greatest

concentrations of rail and highway networks in the central United States, with the potential for faster shipping. Not only did Columbus afford immediate access to three important rail lines, but its moderate climate and a high-quality labor market made it even more advantageous to a logistics mission.

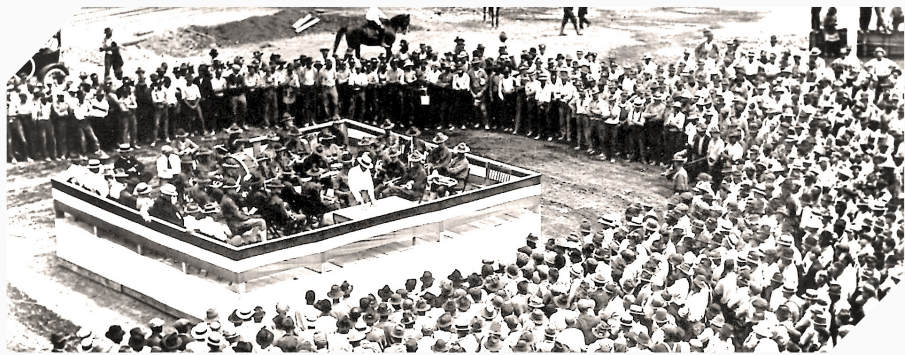
Although World War I for Europe began in August 1914, the United States didn't enter the "Great War" until April 1917. By early 1918, America's war production had reached a critical point. There were suddenly 28 different types of Army quartermaster units. Specialized units needed to be deployed for the first time as transportation lines to ports of

embarkation for troops and materials became filled to capacity.

To relieve the pressure, the War Department appropriated funds to purchase 281 acres about 5 miles east of Columbus and to build a military installation supporting the Allied Expeditionary Forces. Columbus would become part of a complex and extensive depot system to handle millions of tons of supplies for more than 4 million troops. Half those troops were with the American Expeditionary Forces in France.

Following its May 4, 1918, dedication, workers immediately began building warehouses to hold goods and equipment. Meanwhile, administrative and hiring offices were set up in downtown Columbus at Fourth and Long streets. An Aug. 1, 1918, newspaper article reported that "1,000 more workers were needed immediately at the government's military depot on East Fifth Street." At that time, more than 3,000 men and women were already on the job, with about 2,500 of those working 10-hour shifts daily.

Three months later, six warehouses, each more than 1,500 feet long and 181 feet wide, were receiving materiel for storage. In its first 155 days, eight



The May 4, 1918, dedication of the Columbus Quartermaster Reserve Depot. More than 3,000 workers built six buildings and a barracks in the first three months. Eventually the facility held nearly 800,000 square feet of warehouse space for World War I supplies.

warehouses provided more than 1.5 million square feet of storage space for a war effort that created unprecedented logistical problems.

The Army site was named the Columbus Quartermaster Reserve Depot; its mission to route materiel for shipment overseas. The first delivery to arrive was reportedly a shipment of canned pork and beans. The depot primarily handled military food throughout WWI.

In the years to follow, the facility developed into one of the largest and busiest installations of its type in the world in supporting the Quartermaster Corps' demanding mission: to feed, clothe and equip the military.

Additionally, it furnished many vehicles, operated laundries, conducted schools for more than 70 trades and procured the Army's horses and mules. It also handled repairs, salvaged materials, buried deceased soldiers and supervised Army and national cemeteries. Many of these tasks were performed at the Columbus Depot, where as many as 7,500 military and civilian personnel worked at the height of WWI.

By the end of the First World War, the depot had expanded until there were 25 warehouses — 17 of which were transportable. After the

war, many of these were dismantled and sent elsewhere.

During the 1920s, the depot's mission was to recondition war materiel for resale. In 1930, it was renamed the Columbus General Depot, and shortly thereafter became the District Headquarters for the Civilian Conservation Corps for Ohio and West Virginia.

In August 1942, the quartermaster general assumed responsibility of the General Depot Branch, Service of Supply, and the depot became known officially as the Columbus Quartermaster Depot, jointly occupied by all the military services.

Even in the early days of World War II, the Columbus General Depot had begun to play a key role in the Army's supply system. In December 1942, the government purchased an additional 295 acres, expanding the depot to 576 acres, as storage space grew to almost 13.5 million square feet in 41 warehouses, 64 supplementary structures and open storage areas.

The vast network of warehouses stored supplies for what were then the seven primary supply services: chemical, engineer, medical, ordnance, signal, transportation and quartermaster. Meanwhile, the depot had grown to become the second largest employer in Franklin County.

In March 1943, the name was changed to Columbus Army Service Forces Depot, and the installation became the largest joint military supply



Armada Ruffner, director of Columbus Quartermaster Depot's spiderweb production shop, coaxes a black widow from its jar. Huffner harvested silk from the deadly spiders for use in gun sights and compasses.



installation in the world in tonnage handling capability. It employed more than 10,000 civilians and played a large part in the war effort.

Near the end of WWII, the installation took on a new role. About 400 German prisoners of war, ranging in age from 22 to 52, arrived at the depot Jan. 22, 1945. By spring, their number rose to 500. Guarded by a staff of 58 men, mostly former military, the POWs did work compatible with the Geneva Conventions rules and received 84 cents per day. They remained on-site for 11 months before departing for Camp Perry, Ohio, in January 1946, on their way home to Germany.

The Log of Columbus, the installation's newspaper at the time, reminded employees to clean up after themselves, because "Prisoners of War cannot continue their Saturday cleanup duties much longer for soon they will be cleaning up the rubble of Germany."

On Jan. 1, 1963, the installation was assigned to the Defense Supply Agency (now the Defense Logistics Agency) and combined with the Defense Construction Supply Center on an adjoining property.

In 1996, the Defense Electronics Supply Center in Dayton, Ohio, was closed due to Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommendations. The workload and workforce of DESC merged with DCSC to become the Defense Supply Center Columbus. That same year saw the opening of a new seven-story granite



Warehouse 1 stored supplies and served as the installation's first headquarters in 1918.

building that remains the central operations center for DLA Land and Maritime.


Through the years, the installation saw many hundreds of thousands of workers pass through its gates. The post's function to supply parts and equipment made up the mission, but it was the people who gave the installation its character.

One manager with a unique responsibility was Armada Ruffner. She supervised a workforce of hundreds of silk production specialists in 1943. Ruffner's job was unlike any other in support of the WWII war effort; she oversaw the office where staff extracted silk from black widow spiders for repair technicians to use in gun-sight crosshairs and compasses. Until improvements in synthetic fiber made it obsolete, the shop for harvesting silk from black widows in Columbus was the only one of its kind in the Quartermaster Corps.

In July 2014, Stephen F. Byus, a supervisory supply specialist with DLA Land and Maritime, deployed to Afghanistan to help the Afghan military improve its maintenance and supply systems. On Sept. 16, his two-vehicle

convoy was attacked. Byus became the first DLA civilian killed during Operation Enduring Freedom. One of the installation's original buildings was renovated into a community center and named in his honor.

Today, DSCC remains a vital logistics center, providing weapons system and platform support to U.S. forces and other federal agencies across the globe. DLA Land and Maritime manages more than 2 million unique inventory parts to support several thousand multiservice weapons systems and the warfighters who rely on them. The installation also hosts Defense Finance and Accounting Service Columbus, National Guard and Reserve units and a military recruiting headquarters.

For the 8,000 military and civilian employees who work at DSCC, the long legacy of warfighter support is one forged in consistent dedication to service — one that has remained steadfast for 100 years. 

*Editor's Note —  
Tony D'Elia, former historian for DLA Land and Maritime, contributed to this article.*

## A CENTURY OF NAMES FOR DEFENSE SUPPLY CENTER COLUMBUS

100 Years — 14 Names

