

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Paving the Way to Victory

“Undoubtedly, the ability to build pavements quickly where they were needed was a major factor in bringing the war to a successful conclusion.”

WHEN THE FIRST Japanese torpedo bombers swept in over Oahu to attack Pearl Harbor, they did not catch a nation totally unprepared for war. Overseas developments during the turbulent decade of the 1930s had pushed our once-isolationist nation into looking outward again. The onset of war in Europe, starting with the Nazi invasion of Poland in September, 1939, provided the spark. By December 7, 1941, the Day of Infamy, the United States already had a two-year head start in building the mightiest war machine on the planet.

THE GREAT MOBILIZATION

If America was to have any chance at all in the upcoming global war, it had to build a large army and an ancillary air armada from what had been a relatively minor force. It also had to revive a dormant munitions industry to arm them. The foundation of this growth was the construction of needed bases and support facilities.

For the United States Army and its Air Corps, this meant camps, cantonments, depots, arsenals, and airfields. The U.S. Navy required bases, ports, and airfields of its own. There were munitions plants, transportation facilities, hospitals, and headquarters to be built. As the army grew from 200,000 soldiers in the 1930s to over 1.6 million by 1941, construction expenditures grew to \$15.6 billion (more than \$180 billion in 2005 terms).

Seabees paved miles of runways and roads with asphalt in both the Pacific and Atlantic theaters of World War II. Here, the 53rd Naval Construction Battalion blacktops a road on Guam in 1945.

