

Lilienthal and Groves comments on CEW transfer to AEC

While searching for details of the reduction in force at Y-12 I came across another interesting article in The Oak Ridge Journal. This January 2, 1947, article contained quotes from David Lilienthal, first Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, and Major General Leslie Groves when the Atomic Energy Commission took over the Manhattan Project.

Lilienthal indicated that the experience and loyalty of those who have been associated with the Manhattan Project formed the greatest asset which the AEC acquired. This workforce was unique and had proven itself during the long years of working to win the war.

Groves said, "Working together in a common effort for the common good you have achieved a miracle... I know that you will continue to work with that high sense of loyalty and devotion which has characterized your work during the last five years." Groves well knew the value of the dedicated efforts of the workers as he had personally seen the results of their drive to succeed.

Lilienthal's complete statement was printed in the article as follows, "On behalf of the Atomic Energy Commission, it is a great pleasure to welcome you to association with the Commission in carrying out the purposes of the Atomic Energy Act of 1946. The effective date of the transfer of the Manhattan District to the Atomic Energy Commission is set for January 1, 1947."

"In becoming employees of the Atomic Energy Commission, we want you to know that you will be transferred to the Commission at your present grade, salary or wages, with your present work assignments and with all of your present rights with respect to annual and sick leave, retirement benefits, veteran's preference, if any, Civil Service status, if you have it, and any other earned rights established by law or Civil Service rule or regulation."

"As we administer the existing program of the Manhattan District, and as we develop new or different concepts of organization and administration needed to give full expression to the opportunities and responsibilities of the Commission, there will be changes from time to time in organizational structure and in the specific duties which may fall upon any individual. As we look at the future the full discharge of our responsibilities in carrying out the broad objectives of the Act creating the Commission should provide real opportunities for all of use. The experience and loyalty of those who have been associated with the project form the greatest asset the Commission acquires as it sets about its new tasks.

"We join General Groves in congratulating you upon your great achievements and look forward to your continued loyalty and effective support."

"As we enter the New Year and the real beginnings of the Atomic Energy Commission, we welcome your partnership in this great enterprise."

Major General Groves' statement was next. "The atomic Energy Commission appointed under the provisions of Public Law 585 will assume responsibility for the conduct of the Manhattan Project at midnight, 31 December 1946. At that time my active participation in the Atomic Energy program will cease."

"Five years ago, the idea of Atomic Power was only a dream. You have made that dream a reality. You have seized upon the most nebulous of ideas and translated them into actualities. You have built cities where none were known before. You have constructed industrial plants of a magnitude and to a precision heretofore deemed impossible. You built the weapon which ended the War and thereby saved countless American lives. With regard to peacetime applications, you have raised the curtain on vistas of a new world. Working together in a common effort for the common good, you have achieved a miracle – a miracle possibly only under the American way of life."

"As I leave the organization, I am deeply appreciative of the privilege I have had in working with you. Most of you will remain in your present positions; I know that you will continue to work with that high sense of loyalty and devotion which has characterized your work during the last five years I extend to

each of you my personal as well as official gratitude for your unremitting devotion to the project and my every good wish for the future.”

These words of both Lilienthal and Groves speak volumes about the workers of the Manhattan Project. This transition was a key element in the transfer and control of nuclear energy related work. The atomic bomb had brought about what Groves called a “miracle” and “vistas of a new world.” Both men had to know they were standing at a crossroads in technological advancement and don’t you know the excitement was heavy in the air.

Next we will look at a most unusual attempted application of nuclear energy – to fly airplanes.