



1940s



On December 18, 1941, The Secretary of War issued the directive to acquire Letterkenny for an ordnance depot. Letterkenny's mission in the 40s was to reduce the surplus of forthcoming war materiel and to store and ship ammunition, trucks, parts and other supplies. The site was carefully chosen. It was a safe, yet convenient distance from eastern seaboard with land well suited for ammunition storage. It had good rail facilities, nearby power and water and another great resource - its people, who historically had shown great courage and perseverance.

Construction began immediately with 802 underground igloos, 12 above-ground magazines and 17 warehouses. The first shipment of ammunition arrived by train on September 23, 1942, three weeks ahead of schedule. More than three million tons of supplies were moved during the war years.

As men were called to service, staffing problems became acute. Women, Commandos, Minute Men, even Italian prisoners of war filled the jobs. From 1943 until the 1950s, women made up 50 percent of the workforce. Regular employees worked seven days a week and blitzes were common.

With ingenuity and devotion, Letterkennians completed seemingly impossible tasks to keep ordnance materiel flowing constantly to 70 theaters of war. Letterkenny was one of the largest depots of its kind and was called the Springboard of Invasion in 1944.

Letterkenny's Ordnance Song is written in three weeks by James C. Weaver, a temporary employee. He is inspired by the diligence of the workers who are furthering the war effort. The song is orchestrated by the Letterkenny Dance Orchestra and recordings sell for 75 cents.

UNCLE SAM
Letterkenny's very own "Uncle Sam" is George B. McClellan "Pop" Flora, who at 81 years old works in Transportation. He sells war bonds in a very patriotic way. He is even kicked out of his church due to his selling of war bonds there.



In January 1945, work started on the Letterkenny Chapel by members of the Italian Service Unit who desired a place of worship.



Igloos are solid concrete affairs covered with earth. When the igloos are built, each piece of metal used is grounded. They are safely spaced in case of explosion. Waterproofing igloos prevents possible moisture damage to stored ammunition.



Employees tape safety blocks in fuses before shipping. The sandbag walls provide protection and a place where ammunition can be thrown in fear of detonation.

The Ammunition Stock Control Section is moved into a new building finalizing the centralization of all ammunition storage activities.

Part of a crew renovates bomb clusters to ensure effective firepower.



W.O.W.'s (Women Ordnance Workers)
January 1943, the ammunition section is sent the first women to be employed in this division. Ammunition Handling School taught women to handle 4,000 pound bombs. Their first assignment is to dip hand grenades in olive drab paint.



Letterkenny's second locomotive, "Panama Hattie" is an old-time veteran of the Panama Canal construction in 1908. By 1943 six locomotives with 486 men are on duty.