In 1935, Lennox furnaces were built with blowers and enameled cabinets for the first time. Norris began holding classes to teach Lennox dealers the new heating system — a forerunner of today's sophisticated Lennox dealer support program.

"A Miracle"

By the end of the 1930s, John Norris had become the top warm-air heating engineer in the country, and Lennox was the world's largest manufacturer of forced warm-air heating systems. But the Great Depression also brought tough times to the company. "There was almost no demand for furnaces at all," a family member said. "How D.W. survived that decade is a miracle." D.W. Norris traveled almost constantly by train from coast to coast to make deals with business associates and financial advisors, writing page after page of letters in his careful longhand.
Meanwhile, Lennox salesmen managed to secure several government furnace contracts, including a large contract to heat the barracks of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

While the first Lennox furnaces with blowers and enamelled cabinets were rolling off the assembly lines in 1933, another young M.I.T. graduate became credit manager of the company's operations in Syracuse, New York. E.C. Ted' Booth had been a special agent for Acton Casualty in Syracuse, where he had met D.W. Norris' daughter Loraine. They were married in 1931 and D.W. soon persuaded his new son-in-law to join the company. Booth eventually became corporate secretary-treasurer and stayed with Lennox until he retired in 1963.
At the end of the 1930s, Lennox developed the 'Stowaway' furnace, the first forced air furnace designed to be installed in an attic or crawlspace. It was a triumphant finish to a difficult but exciting decade. During ten years darkened by world-wide financial depression and business catastrophe, John Norris had revolutionized an entire industry while his father had managed to continue securing valuable business contracts. That combination of innovation and hard work — a success formula forged long ago in the noise and sweat of Dave Lennox' machine shop — would serve the company well during the trials and opportunities of World War II.
By the time World War II came along, "recalled a Norris family member, "Lennox was ready for it." The steady growth brought about by John Norris' innovations resulted in the building of a new factory in Columbus, Ohio in 1940. The SS:1000 steel furnace was an instant success when introduced in 1941. After the challenges of the Great Depression, there was plenty of cause for optimism.

Despite the attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the war in December 1941, D.W. Norris saw even greater things in Lennox' future. In July, 1943 he wrote a memorandum to Lennox employees and titled it "Oh, What A Business To Come."
"Regardless of Hitler," he wrote, "old furnaces wear out and must be replaced... people are enjoying the highest living power in all history and there is little they can buy with their surplus money except replacements for worn-out heating units... a government survey shows nearly three million families plan to buy or build new homes after the war and millions more are thinking about it... young man, when you get back from this war go into the furnace business!"

D.W. Norris went on to write, "Give us the go sign and we can be ready before the steel can get to us from the steel mill."

"Swords from Plowshares"—Battleships Instead of Furnaces

The August, 1943 edition of "The Lennoxaire" told the story of Lennox' contribution to the building of submarine-hunting destroyer escorts for the U.S. Navy. The bottom of the page includes some of the other implications of war the furnace company had a hand in manufacturing.
But there was little steel being used to make furnaces or any other civilian products during the war. Special government orders forced Lennox and other manufacturers to convert their factories and fill government contracts for war-related materials. Lennox responded to the call by purchasing a precision machine shop in Lima, Ohio, to produce military equipment requiring close tolerance parts.

From Adversity To Opportunity

Lennox filled orders for combat tank parts, steel landing mats for emergency airfields, frames for portable airplane hangars, and various parts for ships and airplanes. "We're learning new production techniques which are going to be applicable to the furnace business," D.W. Norris said. "Already we know of many positive changes we can make in Lennox products." Furnaces were built — but mainly to heat army camps at home and abroad.

From Somewhere In Italy, 1945

"Here it is 1945 and I'm just getting around to writing that I'd received two copies of The Lennox News and think it's swell. Seemed pretty good to find out what the boys back in the plant were doing..."

"We've been doing pretty good over here. I've got half of my bombing missions in, but it's going pretty slow now because of the bad weather. Sunny Italy is a sea of mud and it's hell... I don't see how the boys on the front can do anything with ankle-deep mud all around. At the rate we're going I should be home by next June, I hope.

"It isn't so bad over here but I've wished quite a few times that I was back on the mounting floor at the plant, especially when that flak starts bursting up there. I'm not kidding, you really sweat it out. Those Germans know how to use those guns and they don't kid around much...

"As yet I haven't seen any Lennox furnaces over here but wouldn't mind it too much if we had one... How have things been going at the plant? Have you any girls working there? Tell Fred and the boys 'hello' for me... tell the boys to keep on their jobs because this war isn't over by a long shot."

— a 19 year-old lieutenant of the Fifteenth American Air Force and a former Lennox factory employee, from a letter printed in the Lennox News

1940

German armies overrun Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France; enter Paris on June 14; prepare to invade England

1941

Nazi armies overrun Yugoslavia, Greece and Crete; Italian forces, and advance in the west to the outskirts of Leningrad and Moscow before winter sets in.
Lenox dealers also managed to meet wartime challenges, living primarily on maintenance work. Personnel shortages created new working relationships. "If you retailers think women cannot get a Torrid Zone furnace into a basement, forget it," D.W. Norris said in a letter to dealers. "They can."

The news at home could be as ominous as the news from overseas: in the winter of 1942, the Syracuse factory was nearly completely destroyed by fire, causing over a million dollars in losses. "150 Men Thrown Out of Work" declared a Syracuse newspaper headline, and a company spokesperson said it would "take years" to replace valuable company records.

Syracuse Fire Loss Exceeds Million Dollars
2 Firemen Overcome as Wind Spreads Flames—150 Men Thrown Out of Work

Although the Lenox Syracuse factory was nearly completely destroyed by fire in the winter of 1942, it was quickly rebuilt and played a major role in wartime defense production.

Lend-Lease Act to under British war effort passed by Congress
Japanese attacks U.S. Fort at Pearl Harbor, also attack Guam, Philippines, and Hong Kong; U.S. declares war

"Manhattan Project" of intensive atomic research begins
First operational jet flight test in Germany
Joe DiMaggio hits safely in 56 consecutive games
Worlds' ears.Triple Crown Citizen Kane released

1942
Lenox Syracuse factory destroyed by fire but quickly rebuilt
Doolittle Raiders bomb Tokyo in B-25 bombers launched from carrier

Defense plants turn to women labourers
U.S. military to Philippines surrenders; Bataan Death March follows
U.S. Navy strikes four Japanese carriers at Midway
But the plant was quickly rebuilt, and manufacturing soon started again. With the war at its height and a backlog of government contracts to fill, Lennox had little time to lose.

Still, dealers continued to be frustrated—but by January, 1944 Lennox was beginning to return to furnace building. "We have a manpower problem," Norris wrote to the dealers, "and material is scarce. Railroad service is slow...trucks are not dependable...our people are working in two and three shifts around the clock to fill government contracts, but you Lennox dealers are going to get your furnaces." In the meantime, Norris urged dealers to "take your frustrations out on Hitler."

They make TANKS of STEEL
BECAUSE IT'S TOUGHER

Can You Imagine
A Tank Made Of Cast Iron?

LENNOX Furnaces—like Tanks
ARE BUILT OF FINEST STEEL
REVISED FOR STRENGTH AND
PERMANENTLY HEATED TO
MAKE THEM GAS-TIGHT.

LENNOX Furnace Company
Marshalltown, Iowa
Columbus, Ohio
Syracuse, New York

1942
Sugar and gasoline rationing begins in U.S.
Joe Louis retains heavyweight title, enters armed services

1943
Allied armies take North Africa and Sicily invade Italy
U.S. forces take Guadalcanal, begin "field hopping" offensive in Pacific
Eisenhower made supreme commander of allied forces in Europe

1944
Allies advance in Italy, Rome falls
Allied forces invade France in D-Day invasion, cross German frontier by year's end

Shoes, meat, cheese, fat and canned foods rationed
Gasoline wins best picture award
Oklahoma begins "Oklahoma!" performance run on Broadway
John L. Thomas, Lennox Dealer, 1944

“A person from the far east or from a large city would be amazed if he walked into Traer, Iowa, a town of 1,493 persons. Leaving the tiny depot he would walk the several blocks to the business home of John L. Thomas, Lennox dealer in that town...

"John and his son, Paul, run the present business, but John no longer tries to do much outside work ... John came to Traer in 1888, working in a tin shop almost immediately. At that time, almost 57 years ago, furnaces were practically unknown in that territory, the few in town being cast iron.

"It was in 1928 that John started with Lennox as a dealer, and sold his first Torrid Zone furnace, an O28, in about 1900. 'In the old days, installation was more or less hazardous,' said John. Figuring 3TU, CFM and static pressure was unknown ... it was a case of guesswork ...'.

'We certainly owe Lennox a lot for their loyalty and help they have offered for the past 45 years I have been a Lennox dealer. In fact, the first Torrid Zone I bought was from old Dave Lennox, before Mr. Norris was in the firm. In those days they sent a man from the factory to supervise the installation.

"Paul and I are looking forward to seeing the new Lennox models, especially the oil burner units.'"

— The Lennox News, October, 1944
The Lennox Furnace Company, is the largest manufacturer of furnaces in the world," stated the editorial in the January, 1947 Lenox News. Like most industries, Lennox emerged from the chaos of the war years with disrupted manufacturing schedules, enormous order backlogs, and material shortages resulting from labor strikes at other companies. But the same editorial confidently reminded employees, "work and more work, aggressiveness, and ingenuity have been prominent in Lennox success to the present. They will continue to be foremost in the future."

The company moved immediately to convert its wartime assets. Once filled with the sounds of workers producing parts for tanks and bombers, the Lima, Ohio machine shop became part of the Lima Register Company in 1945, a major supplier of...