

A: Well, with that we took over the Central Pacific area and command and they all came under our control. That meant that Okinawa, which had been under the Central Pacific, was now under our jurisdiction. So in addition to the Philippines and the areas that we had before, we expanded our operations to take in Okinawa, where fighting was still under way, and ultimately Japan.

Knowing the importance of Okinawa, particularly in connection with its use as a base for projected operations against Japan, I sensed its major importance. So even without instructions I promptly flew up to Okinawa. General [George J.] Nold was the engineer under General [Simon B.] Buckner, commanding general of Tenth Army, who was later killed-in fact, he was killed shortly after I was up there. He was killed on the very same spot where I had gone to do certain observations on our operations against Naha.

I noted the problems they were having in connection with their airdromes development program. I sensed that they needed additional engineer support. So on my return to Manila, I ordered either five or six engineer battalions (construction battalions or aviation engineer battalions) up to Okinawa under Nold to reinforce their engineer strength, even though we had problems, though of less strategic importance, down in the Philippines. I felt the need then for work up there was of far greater importance than reconstruction in Luzon.

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Q: What was Simon Bolivar Buckner like?

A: I didn't have much opportunity to know him. I knew him during the few days that I was up there on my inspection tour when I was working with Nold. He seemed to be a very likable as well as able person. I thought he had the situation well in hand, with a fine headquarters and staff. Also, I don't recall who was in command of the large force of Seabees-a senior Seabee officer-but I had a good relationship with him, too. They were all functioning well as a team on this joint effort.

Q: What about George Nold, who had been engineer up in the Alaska Department before going to the Pacific?

A: I'd known George since our relationship on the Engineer Rifle Team. He was a member of the team, and he and I had been shooting partners. Also, he served on the team again when I was coach of the team. So I'd known him very well. I don't know about his operations or activities up in Alaska. I knew that he had served up there. But he had taken hold and was doing very well with—was it the Tenth Army?

Q: Tenth Army.

A: The Tenth Army, yes. He was doing a very good job.

Q: Did you have anything to do with General Frink's establishment of engineer districts to assume construction responsibilities in the Philippines in February 1945?

A: I don't think that General Frink was the one that had to do with the establishment of the engineer districts. Jack Sverdrup, my deputy, and I were talking about it, appreciating that reconstruction of the Philippines and some of the other work there was not, you might say, an active military operation under combat conditions. We felt that, knowing what we had to do for the invasion of Japan (for Kyushu and for Honshu), calling for large forces for Okinawa, it would be desirable to organize an engineer division and districts for the Philippines to release all of our engineer troop units for the forward operations.

I think we prepared a study and presented it. I don't know whether it went through Frink or directly through MacArthur, with Frink's coordination and cooperation. We recommended the setup that was to be the Western Ocean Division, with division headquarters on the West Coast, setting up a district in Manila, in Guam, and also ultimately in Okinawa as and when the tactical situation there was resolved.

Q: Sverdrup pushed the idea for a single construction command in the Southwest Pacific and finally got the establishment of 6 March 1945 of the

Engineer Construction Command (ENCOM) that was set up under him, assigned to USASOS to coordinate and supervise all construction in the Southwest Pacific. How did that function?

A: It wasn't to supervise all construction in the Southwest Pacific. It was primarily to undertake all the construction there on Luzon. That was a major construction job. So we set up this Engineer Construction Command so that all of our engineer units would be under a central engineer headquarters.

Q: Did it work as you planned it?

A: Yes, it worked well.

Q: Simplified the construction and the management of construction?

A: Yes.

Q: Colonel Thomas Lane, who was then Sverdrup's operational chief, suggested a separate district be set up to rehabilitate Manila. Now MacArthur asked Reybold to supply the personnel for this, which he did; and he established the General Engineer District at Manila. Did it do its job well?

A: I think I was ahead of myself when I talked about the organization of the Western Ocean Division. I think the first phase was this establishment of GENED, this General Engineer District, to take care of the peacetime reconstruction in Manila. It worked effectively. As I say, it was a prelude to later on the setting up of the Western Ocean Division with separate engineer districts in Manila, Okinawa, and Guam.

General Comments

Q: Was ENCOM what the engineers had wanted since Australia? Was it what you wanted to have as your construction agency all throughout the war?