

End of the War with Japan and Occupation

Q: Did the atomic bombings and the war's swift end in August 1945 surprise you?

A: Yes. The atomic bombing was a surprise to us. We had not been made cognizant of the advances there nor of the plans, even though we were ordered to prepare special hardstandings for the planes that came over with the atomic bombs prior to the dropping of them on Japan.

But I think everybody felt that Japan was nearing its end. Their navy had been destroyed; air force had been heavily damaged and largely destroyed. All their forces outside of Japan, certainly in our area, had been virtually exterminated.

As I understand it, just prior to the termination of the war, Japan had actually sought to seek an armistice, to discuss surrender. As I understand it, they transmitted that through the Soviet Union, with whom they were still on diplomatic terms. Instead of forwarding that, I think the Soviet Union sensed that here was an opportunity to actually get into the war. And particularly after the atomic bombs were detonated, it seemed that the Soviet Union then was definitely going to get into the war.

After only about one week's operation, it came off the big winner in taking over Sakhalin Island and the group of [Kurile] islands north of Japan, in taking the surrender of the Japanese troops in Korea, in taking up all their arms and armament there and making them available to their Communist associates in China and elsewhere, all at no cost.

It was tragic that the Soviet Union actually did get into the war when they did. If they had entered into it earlier and had helped or had been a helpful factor in it, then that would have been quite a different situation. But they did get in just in time to reap the spoils at no cost at all to them.

Q: You landed at Atsugi Airfield on 30 August with General MacArthur and proceeded to Yokohama. You then went on into Tokyo looking for headquarters facilities. How would you describe your feelings and General MacArthur's on that day?

A: Well, one of great satisfaction. Incidentally, incident to that, about a week before we flew in, General Chamberlain called me in and wanted me to head up a group of engineers to proceed up to Atsugi about a week before our projected landing there to check over the airfield and to make sure that things were prepared for these future landings. I would have been the first one of our GHQ to land in Japan.

When we presented that to General MacArthur, General MacArthur said, "No, we will not send Pat nor any general officer nor anybody above the rank of colonel." So we setup this little party of engineers under Colonel Charles P. Tench—he's retired now and living in New Orleans. They went in ahead to check over the airfield. We had sent a radiogram to the Japanese that we wanted a certain number of graders and dozers and whatnot available at the site. But they regretfully indicated that they didn't have them to furnish, indicative of the shortage of such engineer equipment in Japan. But anyway, our force did go in there and did check to see that the field was suitable, with minor improvements, for this projected landing.

After our landing and en route from Atsugi to Yokohama, it was interesting that the road on both sides was lined with Japanese troops, and all of them facing outward with their backs to us. Instead of being a sign of disrespect, it was a measure that they had taken so that these troops could watch against any possible attack from either side of the road against our convoy. We arrived in Yokohama without incident. Very shortly after we arrived, I approached General MacArthur to see whether I might go up to Tokyo to check on facilities there. Tokyo and the intervening area were not going to be open to us until the following week in order to give the Japanese time for the large force of troops that were stationed between Tokyo and Yokohama to be moved out for demobilization.

General MacArthur approved and my small group started out with two Japanese cars—General Sverdrup, a Japanese State Department representative, a Colonel Mashbir who spoke Japanese, and Japanese interpreters and drivers—and proceeded up from Yokohama to Tokyo to investigate conditions there.

It was interesting that on the way, halfway up at a railway station, the road was completely filled with Japanese troops who were waiting apparently for the train to take them on out to wherever they were being transferred. So there we went slowly with these two cars right through this mass of

troops-two little islands in a floating sea of Japanese troops. All the troops did was make way and just look at us with curiosity. We then and there sensed that this was going to be a peaceful occupation. We did have our pistols with us and cocked. They were ready, but would not have been too helpful.

We got to Tokyo. We found there had been much destruction, checked in on the Imperial Hotel, and looked at certain buildings as possible future headquarter buildings. I also proceeded to the American embassy to check it out. It was then under charge of a Swiss couple who had been caretakers through the war. Inside the embassy there were crates of furniture and rolls of rugs belonging to Ambassador [Joseph] Grew, the former American ambassador. Here his possessions had all been prepared and packed for shipment. They were intact. There had been no looting, no ravaging of the area, no taking of these as spoils of war. There was bombing damage only to one small section of the embassy. All around the area there was complete devastation from our bombing, but the bombing had carefully avoided the embassy itself.

The Swiss couple told us that during these bombing attacks the Japanese around there would come up pleading to open the gates so that they could take refuge in the embassy grounds. They'd open them Up and let the Japanese in. When the air raid was over, the Japanese would politely bow, thank the caretakers for letting them into this haven of safety, and proceed home about their business.

I visualized that if the conditions were reversed and the Japanese were invading the United States and they had their embassy in Washington, I would not conceive that that Japanese embassy would have lasted very long. We'd have broken the windows and smashed it up and probably wrecked and looted it. This was one little incident that gave me an impression of certain things about the Japanese.

Q: Did MacArthur's appointment as Supreme Allied Commander or Supreme Commander, Allied Powers, alter your responsibilities any?

A: Not materially. Of course, it was our function to carry on the engineer effort in connection with the overall program in the Far East. One particular additional assignment we had was the Post-hostilities Mapping Program.

That project was falling on the engineers to conduct a vast mapping program of Japan, of Okinawa, of Korea, as well as getting as much information as we could on China. That meant also getting from Japanese sources such maps and records as they had.

Then we had the problem of reconstruction, and clearance of the ports in order to make accessible to American needs the ports and related facilities. There was also the matter of rehabilitation of the railroads that had been damaged and the roads, too, that had been severely damaged.

We also were to embark on a major airdrome construction program. The Japanese airdromes in Japan as well as those we had encountered in previous operational areas were of light construction compared to our requirements, short and narrow fields, so that there was a major program involved in connection with providing and improving those airfields. Incidentally, we also built the Haneda airfield, which is now the major Tokyo Airport, by connecting two small islands in the bay with massive dredged fill, a major operation, and providing the necessary auxiliary features.

We had a major task of providing quarters for the anticipated arrival of thousands of dependents of our armed forces. We prepared standard plans for those structures conforming to Japanese measurements and Japanese materials that we could use. We prepared a mass of plans for the various types of structures to be used in those installations.

We built several major projects, such as those at Washington Heights and Grant Heights for 800 and 1,200 families, small communities complete with utilities, schools, chapels, commissaries, clubs, and all facilities for a small community. We built several such areas throughout Japan.

We also controlled, as far as the engineers were concerned, the allocation of scarce materials and equipment between the civil needs of Japan and its reconstruction and also on the needs of the military for our work.

Q: Apparently in 1946-1947 you had some problem with unit commanders who decided to undertake special projects that were quite extravagant in some cases. Did this present a lot of problems for you as chief engineer?

A: We frequently had to clamp down on unit commanders. Here we were [the] occupying force of a defeated nation. And some of the commanders in distant locations were prone to try to give early priority to provision of officers clubs and other, let's say, luxury-type items rather than early basic needs of shelter and military-type construction, such as airfields or depots or pipeline facilities. But we were able to handle it. As I say, we had a number of incidents where such corrective action had to be taken.

Q: You were telling me the other day about your involvement in saving the Japanese war art.

A: The engineers had been charged with war art activities during the war, although during the war some congressman introduced a bill prohibiting the allocation of any funds for such purposes and orders went out to the theaters to eliminate any such activity.

I opposed that. Our war art unit had four very fine artists; Captain Barse Miller; Lieutenants Freddy Vidar and Sid Simon; and a civilian artist. I decided to retain them even by devious methods. I had one assigned as my aide. I had used no aide, but I said to Vidar and Simon, " You're my aides, but all you are to do is to continue painting. " We sent Barse Miller to the Air Force, and he continued painting for the Air Force. Our civilian was taken over by *Time-Life* magazine.

When the war terminated we received instructions to gather up all the Japanese war art and to destroy it. I instructed our war art personnel to contact the Japanese. We particularly had contact with General Fujita, who was an eminent, internationally known Japanese artist. Indicative of the weight that had been given by the Japanese to war art, they had promoted this artist to be a brigadier general in charge of those activities. And they had some wonderful paintings, paintings of all types. So we amassed and collected all of them. However, I sensed that it would be terrible to destroy them, so I approached General MacArthur. I said, " We're gathering these paintings, but I feel that we should secure rather than destroy them, merely keeping them out of Japanese hands. "

He said, "All right, Pat. But I hold you personally responsible for them. " The Ueno Museum in Tokyo had a big wing where we carefully stored all of them. Months later, frantic calls came from Washington requesting if

there were any items of war art that they be preserved to be sent on to Washington and other Allies—the Australians, the Soviet Union, and others who were also then seeking them.

In any case, the Japanese war art—a vast collection of paintings—in the face of orders from Washington to destroy them, was preserved. I think many of them were ultimately sent on to Washington, and the others where else I don't know.

Q: What prompted you to initiate the eight-volume history of the *Engineers of the Southwest Pacific* under Lieutenant Colonel George Meidling after the war?

A: Well, I sensed that it would be highly desirable to record in historical volumes—not primarily for public dissemination but particularly for use in our military libraries and military schools, the Command and Staff School, the Air Force Academy, the National War College, service and command headquarters, and so on—the experiences, the difficulties, and the problems that we met during the conduct of the war and the solutions taken; and in those volumes, too, to include recommendations for further improvements which might help those in the future, if, as, and when they were called on in war to meet comparable problems. I am proud of them. I think they have been very helpful. I also think probably they are invaluable sources of reference, possibly in related problems.

Q: They certainly are unique. That's the only thing we have.

In February 1946 the Western Ocean Division was established under Brigadier General L. D. Worsham, with headquarters in San Francisco and districts in Okinawa, the Philippines, and the Marianas, to handle construction. Did you recommend this organization?

A: Yes. As I think we indicated previously, we felt that with the termination of war there would be pressure from the States to bring the boys home. So here we were faced with a rapid demobilization of our experienced units. We had some replacements sent over but consisting largely of untrained troops. We still had a lot of military-type construction to be undertaken in Japan and Korea and with limited engineer troops.

With the major reconstruction that we needed in the Philippines and the plans to develop the Marianas and particularly Okinawa as a major base for our operations, we felt that it would be desirable to get the Corps of Engineers in its normal peacetime function of setting up an Engineer Department division and districts with the experience, knowledge, capacities, and potential that you have through the Chief of Engineers and the Civil Works Division organization, because they would then have access to skilled personnel, administrators, and engineer civil service personnel of experience. So we felt that they would be far better qualified to conduct that work than we would be trying to use limited numbers of American troops that were being, as I say, weakened or actually eliminated by the demobilization.

Q: MacArthur's proposed reconstruction program for Okinawa, which was going to be the major American military base in the Far East, did not fare well in 1946 through 1948. It was constantly cut down or disapproved by Congress or the War Department. How did he react to these reactions?

A: I don't think that he displayed any major disappointment. He and we just recognized that after the termination of hostilities there was a reaction in Washington to cut back on almost everything military, and that sort of went along with it. He tried still to pursue it as best we could with those limitations.

I might add that the district engineers had their own problems with the forces that they were able to bring over. The contractors' forces that were brought over were not always well suited for operations under the conditions that then obtained. There were a lot of them who drank too much. Some of them were a little shiftless. I know the district engineers had trouble with some of the contractors' forces that were on those projects.

Q: How did the establishment of a separate Air Force in 1947 affect your work?

A: It didn't have any material effect on us. Our relationship with the particular commanders continued almost as per usual. I think the Air Force anticipated and actually used more Air Force personnel under their own control on the maintenance of the airdrome; but that had always been our policy.

As I had indicated to General Kenney during the war (and approved by General MacArthur), we wanted to have a centralized construction force that concentrated on whatever phase of construction, air or other, was most important; but that, as and when airdromes were completed and insofar as the maintenance phase of those airdromes was concerned, it would be our policy to allocate aviation engineer units or other units under their direct control for such maintenance responsibility.

Nonelection for Chief of Engineers

Q: What were your relations like with Raymond Wheeler, who was Chief of Engineers after the war?

A: They were excellent. I might tell a little story indicative of that relationship, indicative of such a relationship. I had known General Wheeler when he was a district engineer on civil works duty and I was in the Chief's Office. I'd also known of his excellent work during the war in the Southeast Asia Command. We'd had one or two joint conferences during the war.

But, indicative apparently of his feelings with regard to me, when he was about to retire as Chief of Engineers he wrote me a personal handwritten letter saying that he wanted me as his successor. He said that he felt that President Truman was favoring General Pick [Brigadier General Lewis A. Pick]. General Pick was Missouri River Division Engineer at that time, and with Truman having come from Missouri there was a close relationship between him and the contractors there pressing for Pick. I, of course, was doing nothing nor would I do anything to seek that office. In any case, Truman was President and wanted Pick. Wheeler wrote to me that he was going to defer his retirement and continue on duty as he expected that Truman was not going to be reelected, as everybody did; and that after Truman's successor came in, then he would retire. He thought that I then would be selected as Chief as the choice of the War Department.

Of course, Truman was reelected. Harry Vaughn, who was Truman's principal aide in the White House, served out in the Southwest Pacific. But he had been relieved and sent home by MacArthur, and he held a rather bitter hostility to MacArthur because of that. I think he personally wanted