

## COMMANDING GENERALS IN PANAMA DURING WORLD WAR 2

There follow brief snapshots of the five generals who commanded the Panama Canal Department (the US Army command in the Canal Zone) and, between 1941 and 1947, the Caribbean Defense Command regional theatre command. In addition to their functions in these posts, from 5 September 1939, they exercised final authority over the operation of the Canal and all its adjuncts, appendants, and appurtenances, including control and government of the Canal Zone (and the Panama Canal Railroad), and the Governor of The Panama Canal was subject to that authority.<sup>1</sup> Control and authority reverted to the Governor on 1 July 1946.<sup>2</sup>

### Major General David Lamme Stone

12 April 1937 – 7 January 1940



*Major General Stone in 1936*

15 August 1876 – 28 December 1959

Stone was born in Stoneville, Mississippi, losing his parents whilst still a boy, and being raised by an aunt and uncle. After finishing bottom of his class at the US Military Academy, he was commissioned into the infantry in 1898. He served in Cuba during

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<sup>1</sup> This had also happened during World War 1, and was provided for by section 13 of the Panama Canal Act. The Governor was still responsible for the government of the Canal Zone, and the operation of the Canal and railway, albeit being subject to the ultimate authority of the Commanding General.

<sup>2</sup> [https://archives.federalregister.gov/issue\\_slice/1946/7/2/7327-7330.pdf](https://archives.federalregister.gov/issue_slice/1946/7/2/7327-7330.pdf)

the Spanish-American War, and also saw combat in the Philippines, returning to the US in 1902. During his time in the Philippines, he received a Silver Star and a Purple Heart.

He subsequently obtained experience in construction with the Quartermaster Department, and served in a number of positions using that experience. As division quartermaster with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, he deployed to France in May 1918, becoming a colonel and eventually deputy chief of staff of the Second Army,<sup>3</sup> by now being an officer of the Quartermaster Corps.<sup>4</sup>

Postwar, he was actively involved in the German reconstruction efforts in the Rhineland to June 1920.

During the 1920s, permanently promoted to colonel, he took up a number of command roles, ending up the acting commander of an infantry brigade by 1931. He became a brigadier general in 1933, and a major general in 1936, while occupying a number of command roles.

In April 1937, he became Commanding General of the Panama Canal Department (see boxed text below), remaining in this position until January 1940. During his time the improvement of the Department's defences began to take place. His time in the Canal Zone was cut short by his wife's illness, which led to a request for a transfer to the US.

As 1939 began, plans were already in hand to bolster the Zone's defences, accepted as being inadequate. Improvements to its air defence and coastal artillery were seen as priorities, but in early 1939 Stone urged that no additional troops should be sent until housing was available for them – but shortage of accommodation would continue to

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<sup>3</sup> Only established in October 1918 (the war ending in November), being demobilised in April 1919.

<sup>4</sup> Formed from the Quartermaster Department in 1912, as part of the reforms following the Spanish-American War, the Commissary and Paymaster Departments were consolidated into the Quartermaster Corps; and a Quartermaster School established in 1920. The reforms proved their worth when the US entered World War 1.

be a problem for many more months, particularly as the population of the Zone swelled with both troops and workers.<sup>5</sup>

#### **PANAMA CANAL DEPARTMENT**

Created on 26 June 1917, the Panama Canal Department was created to provide command, control, and administration of Army mobile units and fixed coast defences in the Canal Zone (which had previously been under the old US Eastern Department). An Army organisation akin to a corps – the types of commands that would be found in the Continental US from 1920.<sup>6</sup>

In wartime, the Department was intended to function both as the combat command headquarters for its geographical area and as the headquarters for housekeeping or Zone of the Interior-type units – and might be expected to survive on its own, without reinforcement, at the outset of any conflict. The Department was charged with preparing joint plans with local naval commands to defend its geographic area.

It would normally be commanded by a major general, who would have the title of “Commanding General”.<sup>7</sup>

It was deactivated in 1947, and replaced by the new US Army Caribbean (USARCARIB), which retained its headquarters in the Canal Zone. This was followed by the Caribbean Defense Command being reorganised as the Caribbean Command in March 1948.

While defence of the Canal remained the primary concern of USARCARIB,<sup>8</sup> it acquired other responsibilities in Latin America.<sup>9</sup>

Also in January 1939, he formally recommended extending the defences of the Canal westward into the Pacific to provide a degree of early warning similar to that expected on the Caribbean side with its many islands and available bases – the chief fear was of

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<sup>5</sup> On 22 August, the War Department notified General Stone that “*if war breaks out in Europe*” two regiments of infantry, totalling 2,678 men, with full field equipment, would be sent to Panama “*immediately*”.

<sup>6</sup> Those nine “corps areas” were created by the War Department in August 1920, but the General Order involved did not alter the status of the three overseas Departments – in Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Canal Zone.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combat-studies-institute/csi-books/OrderofBattle1.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> In 1963, USARCARIB became US Army Forces Southern Command, part of US Southern Command.

<sup>9</sup> <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a388262.pdf>

an attacking force of aircraft carriers.<sup>10</sup> In due course, this would lead to a US air base in the Galapagos Islands. In fact, Stone had sent a survey party to the Ecuadorian islands the previous year, and this had found sites for airfields, seaplane bases, and air warning stations there, as well as suitable seaplane anchorages. Also proposed were radar sites on Cocos Island, which belonged to Costa Rica.

In January 1939, Stone told the War Department –

*Modern aircraft with its constantly increasing range, power, speed and armament is daily increasing the potential threat of hostile attack on the Panama Canal. At the same time, it makes available a more powerful element in the defense of the Canal. In order to take advantage of the increase in our air power and enable it to develop its full offensive and defensive strength, we must have outlying air bases located at a long distance from the Canal in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.*

He argued that, for an effective defence, an attacking carrier force would have to be detected at a minimum distance of 1,000 miles (1,609 km), so that bombers would have at least 10 hours to reach the carriers and break up the attack.<sup>11</sup>

Stone also pressed for the airfield at Rio Hato, in the west of the Republic, to be purchased outright and developed as an operating base.<sup>12</sup> He argued that if the Rio Hato field were obtained, no other operating airfields would be needed outside the Canal Zone (in fact many others outside the Canal Zone would be found necessary).<sup>13</sup>

A press interview given by Stone in September 1939 would cause difficulties for Harmodio Arias Madrid, a former President and brother of Arnulfo Arias Madrid, who

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<sup>10</sup> Navy exercises of the 1930s had shown such a surprise attack was likely to achieve success, and the results of the Pearl Harbor attack (if the Japanese task force could have remained undetected for the considerably further voyage to Panama) show what a determined attack could have achieved.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.afhra.af.mil/Portals/16/documents/Studies/51-100/AFD-090601-032.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> For the story of the base at Rio Hato, before, during and after the war, see <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/11/panama-in-world-war-2-rio-hato-use-disuse-reuse-and-as-a-target/>

<sup>13</sup> Whereas the original 1903 Treaty might have allowed the US to acquire such other land outside the Canal Zone essential for the operation and defence of the Canal, revisions agreed in 1936 removed that automatic rights, making the responsibilities joint ones.

would also be elected to that office in 1940. In the interview, Stone appeared to suggest that Harmodio Arias had advised him on finding a suitable arrangement for Rio Hato. In the heightened nationalism of the period (Arnulfo won in 1940 on a nationalist, anti-American platform) this caused criticism. In 1946, Harmodio Arias contacted the retired Stone, asking him to clarify matters, which he did, supplying a letter which he asked to be shown to the editor of *La Nacion*.<sup>14</sup> It was made clear that Harmodio Arias took no part whatever in obtaining the lease of the land at Rio Hato, nor with the renewal of an existing lease.

In 1939, the War Department had construction of three military hospitals in the Canal Zone included in a \$50 million defence augmentation program. The Governor opposed the construction of these new military hospitals because it would create a duplication of facilities, equipment, and personnel that were already available at Gorgas Hospital. In response, General Stone cited the large number of troops expected in the Canal Zone, and asserted that Gorgas Hospital would not be able to accommodate this increased population. He also pointed out that the Third Locks Project<sup>15</sup> would drastically increase the population in the Canal Zone, further overloading the existing civilian inpatient facilities. Finally, he accused Governor Ridley of being more concerned about loss of hospital revenue than anything else. Separately, Stone told the Surgeon General that he could not tolerate "*any such arrangement whereby our men, who are defending the canal, would be left in such a secondary and uncertain status as to hospitalization*". The Surgeon General supported the Department's request for control of its own military medical facilities, and hospitals at Forts Gulick and Clayton were approved.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <http://bdigital.binal.ac.pa/iah/pdf/2.14.6.10.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> By the late 1930s the Canal's locks were already thought too small, and "The Third Locks Project" (aka "the bypass project") was authorised by Congress in August 1939 to provide new, larger locks near existing ones at Gatun, Pedro Miguel and Miraflores in order to increase the Canal's capacity. Contracts for \$99 million were signed in 1940, with an eventual cost estimated at \$277 million. Excavation began in July 1940, and the work saw a large influx of workers – worsening the Zone's accommodation crisis, and resulting in at least one new township being developed. Planned for completion by 1946, the project was abandoned, effectively ending in May 1942. It would be 2016 before new, larger locks came into operation.

For more about the Third Locks Project, see <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/10/the-wartime-panama-third-locks-project/>

<sup>16</sup> *Guarding the Gates: The Story of Fort Clayton - Its Setting, Its Architecture, and Its Role in the History of the Panama Canal* by Susan I Enscoe, Suzanne P Johnson, Julie L Webster, and Gordon L Cohen

Stone also caused something of a diplomatic incident with an order he issued in November 1939, to the effect that, from 1 December, supplies of certain perishable commodities required by the Army would be purchased exclusively from the Commissary Department of the Panama Railroad Company.<sup>17</sup> While such goods were of US origin, this policy prevented Panamanian merchants from competing, as they had done, and the Panamanian Government took up the matter. The new policy was said to be contrary to a declared policy of enabling Panamá to take advantage of its commercial opportunities, and the spirit of the relationship (as "*good neighbors*") between the two countries since the 1936 treaty revisions (which had finally taken effect in June 1939).<sup>18</sup> The General justified the decision by the (limited) state of emergency proclaimed in September 1939.<sup>19</sup>

By 1940, with fighting already taking place in Europe, when the Army's War Plans Division asked Stone if he would like to have the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade or any part of it sent to Panama immediately, he responded "*For security and guarding of canal desire 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade be sent to Canal Zone with full field equipment including peace allowances, motor transport and heavy tentage*". By this time, security measures had been stepped up considerably, including having Army guards on ships in transit.

Before departing his post, General Stone instigated a change in the structure of the defences in the Canal Zone, replacing the Atlantic and Pacific Sectors and organising all the ground forces and defensive installations into a permanent mobile force, with a sector organisation of its own. After leaving in January 1940, his successor would complete the reorganisation.<sup>20</sup>

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(ERDC/CERL Monograph 00-01, Construction Engineering Research Laboratory, US Army Engineer Research and Development Center, September 2000): <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA388262.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1940v05/d1194>

<sup>18</sup> For more on the 1936 Treaty and the changes made, see <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/11/panama-in-world-war-2-the-1936-treaty-and-changes-in-the-relationship-with-the-us/>

<sup>19</sup> A "limited emergency" was proclaimed by the US on 8 September 1939, to safeguard neutrality and strengthen US defence. An "unlimited emergency" was proclaimed on 27 May 1941.

*The Taking of Foreign Ships in American Ports* by LH Woolsey (*The American Journal of International Law*, Vol 35, No 3, July 1941).

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-WH-Guard/USA-WH-Guard-12.html>

After a brief stint as commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps Area in Ohio (he replaced General Van Voorhis, who himself became Commanding General in Panama), he formally retired on 15 August 1940, having reached the mandatory retirement age of 64.

He died in Tacoma, Washington State at the age of 83 and was buried in the Camp Lewis Post Cemetery on 31 December 1959.<sup>21</sup>

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**Lieutenant General Daniel Van Voorhis**

**7 January 1940 – 17 September 1941**



24 October 1878 – 9 January 1956

The son of a Congressman, Van Voorhis was born in Ohio, and left college to enlist in the Army for the Spanish-American War, initially as a corporal but being commissioned as an officer later, and becoming a captain by the end of that war. He was decorated for bravery in fighting in the Philippines.

Following the war, he accepted a commission in the Regular Army, serving mainly in the Philippines until 1914, and in the Pancho Villa Expedition on the Mexican border in 1914.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.historylink.org/File/9100>

The start of World War 1 saw him as Chief of Staff at the Newport News Port of Embarkation in Virginia,<sup>22</sup> transferring to France in 1918 as a colonel, and coordinating the return of US forces from Brest after the end of the war.

The following years saw him involved in various posts in cavalry units until, in 1930, was appointed to command the Army's new experimental mechanised force, first called the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment (Mechanized), and later the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized). He is said to have been important in developing modern mobile mechanised forces tactics.

He was Chief of Staff of the Hawaiian Division 1934-36, and commander at Fort Knox 1936-38, now as a brigadier general. Promoted to a major general in 1938, he took up command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps Area in Ohio. When named as the new Commanding General in Panama, he and General Stone swapped roles.

In October 1939, Van Voorhis was named to become the head of the soon to be activated Caribbean Defense Command (CDC), as well as Commanding General of the Panama Canal Department, both headquartered in Panama. He took up the posts on 7 January 1940. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant general in July 1940.

On 8 May 1941, the Caribbean Defense Command was activated. One of the first tasks the new commander undertook was to complete the reorganisation begun by Stone. This took place as the War Department instructed the commanders in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Canal Zone to submit, for the consideration of the newly created Air Defense Board, a complete study of the problem of defence against air attack.

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<sup>22</sup> When the US entered the war, New York became the Port of Embarkation for troops and general supplies, with Newport News to be used principally for the shipment of animals, forage and heavy ordnance. By the end of the war, over 700,000 troops had passed through, and 9,000 acres of real estate being used by the Army.  
[https://assets.simpleviewinc.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/newportnewsva/Newport\\_News\\_Newport\\_News\\_Port\\_of\\_Embarkation\\_in\\_World\\_War\\_I\\_Guide\\_f03375c3-6638-4791-8451-b42a219b292e.pdf](https://assets.simpleviewinc.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/newportnewsva/Newport_News_Newport_News_Port_of_Embarkation_in_World_War_I_Guide_f03375c3-6638-4791-8451-b42a219b292e.pdf)



The changes made in the Command included creating a Mobile Force intended, in part, to combat any landings attempted by an enemy. The changes adopted received the blessing of Army Chief of Staff, General Marshall, in February 1941, who was inspecting the defences of the Canal at the time.

#### **THE CARIBBEAN DEFENSE COMMAND<sup>23</sup>**

The Caribbean Defense Command was a theatre command created in September 1941 was, at the time, the largest one at the time that involved both ground and air troops; and marked the first use of the policy of grouping all elements under an officer of a branch most likely to bear the brunt of operations in that area. It would be structured by General Andrews, commander from September 1941, into three sectors:

Panamanian, Puerto Rican, and Trinidadian, with sector commanders responsible for defence and training in their respective areas.

Remaining in existence until 1947, it was the first of the US forces' theatre-wide commands, and served as the model for those that followed; and for regional combatant commands (COCOM)<sup>24</sup> that would be created after November 1947 when that system was formally established.

However, the lack of real threat to the region during the war, at least after the "Battle of the Caribbean" against the U-boats in 1942,<sup>25</sup> meant that , it had less military significance during the war than military leaders had originally thought it would.

As the tide of war began to turn, it was increasingly marginalised militarily, with resources and personnel reduced. But it had begun to operate on other fronts such as diplomacy and training, in which it saw increased success, again providing something of a model for those commands that followed postwar.<sup>26</sup>

The Mobile Force consisted of infantry and field artillery,<sup>27</sup> with some of the Quartermaster and Signal Corps troops. The other major unit was the Coast Artillery

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<sup>23</sup> <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/11/panama-in-world-war-2-the-caribbean-defense-command/>

<sup>24</sup> Although each service has its own Chief of Staff and administration, the administration of the US military as a whole is currently separated into several regionally based combatant commands.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the U-boat threat in the Caribbean, see <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/10/panama-and-the-u-boats/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/2458>

<sup>27</sup> With pack howitzers, initially carried on mules, but being replaced by motor transport.

Brigade, said by the *New York Times* to be the largest and most heavily armed artillery unit in the US Army at the time. The changes and the abolition of the Atlantic and Pacific Sectors were put into effect by General Order No. 5, issued by Van Voorhis on 16 February, with formal approval by the War Department following two months later.

Reinforcements continued to arrive and, by the end of January 1940, the strength of the garrison was around 19,500 men; by the end of April it had risen to approximately 21,100.<sup>28</sup>

Following the German attacks in Europe, on 17 June 1940, General Marshall ordered the Panama Canal Department (as well as the Hawaiian Department, and the US West Coast) to maintain an alert against a surprise attack. A directive sent to General Van Voorhis required him to take "every possible precaution" against any sort of action, "naval, air or sabotage," aimed at putting the Canal out of commission and it specified that the "air component and anti-aircraft forces must be in state of preparedness for action at any hour."<sup>29</sup>

On 5 March 1941, President Dr Arnulfo Arias Madrid, despite his nationalist, anti-American stance in the recent election, declared that Panama would cooperate in hemisphere defence by providing the US air bases in Panama's territory outside the Canal Zone.<sup>30</sup> The Panamanian Government stated it would be willing to turn sites over to the US Army, provided the leases were for the duration of the war, compensation was adequate, and Panama would retain jurisdiction over civilians. Negotiations continued until the end of the month, when Panama agreed to let the US occupy the sites, pending the working out of a final settlement, which took many more months,

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-WH-Guard/USA-WH-Guard-12.html>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Lifemag/lmindex.htm>

In any event, Arias Madrid would be deposed in a bloodless coup by the *Policia Nacional* in October, with a new administration proving more amenable.

not helped by the removal of President Arias.<sup>31</sup> During April, General Van Voorhis took over nine sites for airfields and two for aircraft warning stations.

On 1 July 1941, Van Voorhis activated the 550<sup>th</sup> Infantry Airborne Battalion, filling it with volunteers from combat units already in Panama.<sup>32</sup> This was in response to an order received in May which required planning for sending an airborne infantry battalion, preceded by a platoon of parachute troops, from the Canal Zone to the capital of the country in the region if some revolt, change of government, or takeover was threatened.<sup>33</sup>



*Panama's President Arias Madrid reviews US troops, alongside General Jarman (on his right), and General Van Voorhis<sup>34</sup>*

General Frank Andrews had been given command of the air assets in the Canal Zone, and he had conducted an extensive 6,000-mile (9,656 km) inspection of air facilities throughout the theatre,<sup>35</sup>

conferring with area commanders to determine needed improvements. He submitted his report to Van Voorhis, as the theatre commander, on 18 February 1941. This report was said to indicate the need for a unified command and control of all Army air assets in the Caribbean.<sup>36</sup> Andrews based the new Caribbean Air Force (the former Panama Canal Air Force) on the RAF model in the Battle of Britain.

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<sup>31</sup> The Filós-Hines Agreement would follow in 1942: <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/10/panama-operating-outside-the-zone-the-1942-agreement-and-the-1947-row/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://history.army.mil/books/wwii/Framework/ch08.htm>

<sup>33</sup> The so-called Striking Force was later earmarked for action against Martinique, then controlled by the Vichy French authorities. The 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Battalion arrived in the Canal Zone in August.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Lifemag/lmindex.htm>

<sup>35</sup> This being what would become the Caribbean Defense Command; but also somewhat further afield, including Cuba.

<sup>36</sup> What was then still the US Army Air Corps (USAAC) was the air arm, becoming the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) later that year – the US Air Force, as a separate organisation, would not be created until 1947. The US Navy (and Marine Corps), of course, had its own air assets.

# Army Consolidates Caribbean Control

Lt.-Gen. Daniel Van Voorhis Named Chief; Increased Efficiency Aim

WASHINGTON, (AP)—Consolidation of the army's commands at the Panama canal and in the Caribbean area was announced today by Secretary Stimson to strengthen western hemisphere defenses.

Stimson said the existing Panama canal and Puerto Rican departments and the new Trinidad base command would be unified under the command of Lieutenant General Daniel Van Voorhis, canal zone chief.

The purpose of the move, Stimson told a press conference, is to provide a unified command for the entire Caribbean area with the aim of increased efficiency and, particularly, centralized control of air defenses and forces.

Stimson declined to disclose what reinforcements were planned for the Caribbean area or how strong would be units assigned to the new base on Newfoundland.

"What's the use of telling Mr. Hitler how many troops we are sending to the Caribbean?" Stimson said. "He may have sources of finding out but I am not going to be one of them."

The initial garrison for Newfoundland, northernmost of the string of base sites acquired from Great Britain, will leave New York about Jan. 15 aboard the transport Edmund B. Alexander, Stimson said. The vessel, which was the World war transport America, will be moored temporarily at St. John's as a station ship.

Other defense developments announced by the war secretary included:

The war department has allocated \$190,500 for additional construction at the air base being established at Borinquen field, Puerto Rico, swelling the total to be spent there to \$1,181,500.

The department has completed arrangements with the maritime commission for acquisition of the former trans-Pacific Dollar liner President McKinley, which the army will use as a combined passenger and freight transport. The ship is now at Seattle, Wash.

Previously announced tentative schedules for mobilizing remaining units of the national guard will be carried out.

The army's move to unify the Caribbean command followed closely the navy's reorganization of sea forces into Atlantic, Pacific and Asiatic fleets.

## Ship Torpedoed Off Ireland

NEW YORK, (AP)—The Ellerman Wilson freighter *Bawana*, 4943 tons, radioed today that she had been torpedoed about 500 miles northwest of Ireland.

The British vessel had been trading between New York, Canada and England.

Mackay radio said she sent the message at 11:08 a. m. (EST):

"Torpedoed at 57.24 north, 18.4 west."

The 401-foot *Bawana* was only three years old. She was specially constructed for sailing in ice-ridden waters. She last left New York Dec. 15.

## Free France Sub Lost in Action

LONDON, (AP) — "Free French headquarters announced today the 1,400-ton French submarine *Narval*, first unit of the French navy to join Gen. Charles De Gaulle's forces, had been sunk by "enemy action."

A communique said the submarine, a 13-year-old vessel, was in operations with the allied forces after she had "distinguished herself."

## 3 Held in Navy Metals Theft

Naval intelligence officers today

However, Andrews and Van Voorhis did not have a good working relationship, and because of this General Marshall requested that the latter relinquish command early, and promoted Andrews to commander of the new Caribbean Defense Command, taking over on 19 September 1941 with the rank of lieutenant general.<sup>37</sup>

In September 1941, reverting to a major general, Van Voorhis once more became commander of 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, remaining in that post until reaching the mandatory retirement age of 64 in October 1942.<sup>38</sup>

Retiring to Ohio and then Florida, he died in 1956.

*San Pedro News Pilot, Volume 13, Number 266, 9 January 1941*<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Andrews had previously been Marshall's G3 officer, i.e. responsible for operations and plans.

<sup>38</sup> [https://generals.dk/general/Van\\_Voorhis/Daniel/USA.html](https://generals.dk/general/Van_Voorhis/Daniel/USA.html)

<sup>39</sup> <https://cdnc.ucr.edu>



3 February 1884 – 3 May 1943

Probably the most well-known of the Commanding Generals to the outside world. He became the first head of a centralised US air force (though still then part of the Army)<sup>40</sup> and the first air officer to serve on the Army's General Staff. In early 1943, he replaced General Eisenhower as commander of all US troops in the European Theatre of Operations. However, he was killed in an air crash during an inspection tour in Iceland in 1943.

The former Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, used for Presidential flights, and later redesignated the Joint Base Andrews, is named after him.

He was born in Nashville, and graduated from West Point in 1906, being commissioned into the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, later serving in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment.

He first applied to join the Army's aeronautical services, then the responsibility of the Signal Corps,<sup>41</sup> in 1914, but the application was vetoed by his commanding officer. He eventually joined the Corps' Aviation Section in August 1917, as it expanded following

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<sup>40</sup> In 1941, the US Army Air Corps (USAAC) was the air arm, becoming the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) later that year – the US Air Force, as a separate organisation, would not be created until 1947.

<sup>41</sup> Between 1914 and 1918, the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps was the air service of the US Army, replacing the former Aeronautical Division. Following a hiatus after its responsibilities were suspended by President Wilson in 1918, it was succeeded by the US Army Air Service (USAAS) in 1920, being renamed the US Army Air Corps (USAAC) in 1926.

the US entry into World War 1. In April 1918, he was sent to California for flight training, qualifying at the age of 34. For the rest of the war, he served as an administrator in a large training establishment created to provide pilots for the war effort.

Postwar, he was appointed Air Officer of the Army of Occupation in Germany,<sup>42</sup> the commanding officer of the Army being his father-in-law. During this time, he received his permanent promotion to major (though still in the cavalry).

The National Defense Act 1920 created the new US Army Air Service (USAAS) as a combat arm of the Army, and Andrews transferred to it in 1920.

Returning to the US in 1923, he continued his involvement in training, before attending the Air Corps Technical School (the USAAS had become the US Army Air Corps in July 1926), and the Command and General Staff School.

As a lieutenant colonel served as the Chief of the Army Air Corps' Training and Operations Division 1930–1931, and then assumed command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Pursuit Squadron<sup>43</sup> for a short time, before graduating from the Army War College in 1933 and returning to the General Staff in 1934.

1935-36 saw further promotions, to brigadier general and major general, as he was appointed to command the newly formed General Headquarters Air Force (GHQ Air Force), which consolidated all USAAC tactical units under a single commander.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> In what was now designated the Air Service, United States Army.

<sup>43</sup> Until after World War 2, the US Army insisted on describing aircraft that others called “fighters”, as “pursuit” types.

<sup>44</sup> Located in the Continental US, and established on 1 March 1935, the General Headquarters Air Force (GHQ Air Force) comprised of bomber, attack, and pursuit (fighter) aircraft under its control to provide coastal defence: <https://www.afhistory.af.mil/FAQs/Fact-Sheets/Article/459008/1935-the-general-headquarters-air-force/>

Flying units were taken away from Corps commanders, put into single organisation headed by an airman, and reported to the General Staff. Leadership of air arm was divided, with the Chief of Air Corps also reporting to General Staff but having no control of GHQ Air Force.

<https://media.defense.gov/2016/Mar/17/2001481634/-1/-1/0/PAGES%20FROM%20AVIATION%20IN%20THE%20US%20ARMY%201919-1939.PDF>

His support for strategic bombing and the new B-17 saw him fall out of favour when a new USAAC Chief of Staff was appointed, who cut back orders for B-17. He was passed over for appointment as Chief of the Air Corps in 1938, instead becoming an advisor to the new Army Deputy Chief of Staff, General Marshall. His continued vocal advocacy also saw him lose his command of the GHQ Air Force, and he reverted to his original colonel rank. However, he was soon recalled, serving as Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations (G-3) to the new Army Chief of Staff, General Marshall.

As mentioned in the entry for General Van Voorhis, a report Andrews prepared while head of the Panama Canal Air Force on the needs for the Canal Zone and the greater theatre led to General Marshall requesting Van Voorhis relinquish command early, and he promoted Andrews to theatre commander of the new Caribbean Defense Command, in addition to becoming the new Commanding General of the Panama Canal Department. He took over on 19 September 1941, as a lieutenant general.<sup>45</sup>

Andrews was heavily involved in developing the many new airfields being built outside the Canal Zone, including issuing a requirement in May 1941 for his airmen help the engineers in their construction, since substantial numbers of civilian workmen from the US were not expected for some time. Work continued during the rainy season, and he saw that former emergency landing strips developed into auxiliary aerodromes.

The US Navy, which lacked suitable bases on the Pacific approaches to the Canal and believed that the distance from Japan to be too great for a successful attack,<sup>46</sup> largely left defences on that side of the isthmus to the Army, and initially used its patrol aircraft over the Caribbean, not the Pacific. On the other hand, General Andrews took the threat from the Pacific side more seriously.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Andrews had previously been Marshall's G3 officer, i.e. responsible for operations and plans.

<sup>46</sup> Not, in itself, an unreasonable assumption, the distance any attacking carrier force would have to travel, undetected, was immense – and it could be said that the force attacking Pearl Harbor was fortunate not to be detected during its long voyage to Hawaii, a much shorter distance.

<sup>47</sup> *December 7, 1941: The Day No One Bombed Panama* by Karl G Larew (*The Historian*, Summer 2004, Vol. 66, No. 2. Published by Taylor & Francis Ltd).



On 16 February 1942, General Andrews was in Aruba and witnessed the U-boat attack on the island.<sup>48</sup> Two U-boats attacked shipping and shelled the refinery on Aruba

The Caribbean Defense Command signals officer, Brigadier General Harry C Ingles was appointed as chief of staff to General Andrews in 1942, this being significant as communications across the sprawling command was vital – using military wire and radio channels, as well as commercial and British cable services.<sup>49</sup>



*1942: Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Andrews in Panama (Press Photo)*

However, Andrews would not remain in Panama for long, and later in 1942 he relocated to North Africa, where he spent three months in command of all US forces in the Middle East from a base in Cairo. He was replaced as Commanding General and commander of the Caribbean Defense Command as of 9 November 1942, being

succeeded by his close friend, General George H Brett.

Andrews' pleas for reinforcement fared better than others, and by November 1942, when he departed the region, troop numbers reached their wartime peak of 68,000.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> In 1942, Aruba, Curaçao, and the Venezuelan oil fields and refineries provided roughly 95% of the oil required to sustain the East Coast of the US — 59 million gallons a day. The supply of bauxite from British Guiana and Surinam was also crucial for the war effort

<sup>49</sup> *December 7, 1941: The Day No One Bombed Panama* by Karl G Larew (*The Historian*, Summer 2004, Vol. 66, No. 2. Published by Taylor & Francis Ltd).

<sup>50</sup> *Security and Defense of the Panama Canal, 1903-2000* by Charles Morris (Panama Canal Commission).



The Casablanca Conference on January 1943 saw Andrews appointed commander of all US forces in the European Theatre of Operations, in succession to General Eisenhower, allowing the latter to concentrate on the invasions of Sicily and Italy.

On 3 May 1943, Andrews was on an inspection tour when his B-24 Liberator crashed in a landing attempt in Iceland. He was the highest-ranking Allied officer to die in the line of duty to that time in the war.

In February 1944, what is now the Las Americas International Airport in Santo Domingo (then called Ciudad Trujillo), in the Dominican Republic, was inaugurated as the General Andrews Airport in a ceremony attended by Andrews' widow.<sup>51</sup>



*General Andrews Airport, Dominican Republic, in the 1940s<sup>52</sup>*

The former Camp Springs Army Air Field in Maryland was renamed Andrews Field on 7 February 1945. It was later became the Andrews Air Force Base, and later Joint Base Andrews.

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<sup>51</sup> [https://www.criticalpast.com/video/65675080124\\_President-Trujillo-inauguration-airport\\_Andrews\\_plaque\\_Dominican-Republic-Army](https://www.criticalpast.com/video/65675080124_President-Trujillo-inauguration-airport_Andrews_plaque_Dominican-Republic-Army)

<sup>52</sup> <https://memoriasdominicanas.blogspot.com/2014/11/foto-e-historia-del-aeropuerto-general.html>



7 February 1886 – 2 December 1963

If Andrews might be said to be the best known of the Commanding Generals, it is likely that his successor would have the greatest long-term effect in Panama and Latin America, as the Caribbean Defence Command began its evolution into something like future theatre-wide US commands postwar.

Despite being the Commanding General for most of the US participation in the war, he also was soon overseeing a reduction in threat levels, troops numbers and defences in general, beginning in 1943.

Brett is said to have a “larger than life” personality, similar to that of General MacArthur, and in fact he had the misfortune to fall out with the latter. Brett had been in command of US forces in Australia when the Philippines had surrendered to the Japanese in April/May 1942 and Washington had ordered MacArthur to head to Australia to become Supreme Allied Commander in the Pacific. Knowing that MacArthur was not fond of flying and would not travel in anything but the best aircraft, Brett tried to arrange for the best possible aircraft the Army had at their disposal, a B-17 bomber.

However, such aircraft were in short supply and, of just four that Brett was able to secure to ferry MacArthur and his party (which included his family), two had mechanical problems and were unable to make the trip, and another ran out of fuel mid-flight on its way to pick up MacArthur, forcing the pilot to ditch and costing the life of two crewmembers.

The remaining B-17 was an older, worn unit with an inexperienced crew, and MacArthur simply refused to use the aircraft. Already in a foul mood over being ordered to leave the Philippines, MacArthur took personal offence and assumed animosity on Brett's part over MacArthur replacing him as commander in Australia. Despite a replacement B-17 being found, MacArthur was to make a formal request to have Brett removed.<sup>53</sup>

However, Brett was fortunate in being a close friend of Army Chief of Staff, General Marshall, and was moved from Australia to eventually to command the Caribbean Defense Command, where he would remain for the rest of the war.

Brett had been born in Cleveland, Ohio and graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1909, being commissioned into the Philippine Scouts, before transferring to the US Cavalry in 1911.

Returning to the US in 1912, he became a friend of then Lieutenant Frank Andrews (see above). The influence of his friend, and his commanding general, saw Brett transferring to the Aviation Section of the US Signal Corps in 1916.

By the time the US entered World War 1, Brett was a captain, and was sent to France in November 1917. However, he was hospitalised with from appendicitis, recovering to be promoted to major and eventually commanding a camp in England in 1918.

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<sup>53</sup> <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi>

Returning to the US, Brett remained involved in aviation, and the new USAAS. During the late 1920s, he attended the Air Corps Tactical School and the Command and General Staff School, going on to command Selfridge Field, Michigan, and then serving as an instructor 1933-35. As a lieutenant colonel, he attended the Army War College, graduating to be posed as temporary brigadier in command of the 19<sup>th</sup> Wing in the Canal Zone, which was the USAAC command for all its air units in the Canal Zone.<sup>54</sup>

Returning from Panama, and reverting to the rank of colonel, he became chief of staff to General Andrews, then commander of GHQ Air Force (see above). In 1939, he became assistant to the Chief of the Army Air Corps (and for just one month the Chief himself).<sup>55</sup> He went on as Commandant of the Engineering School, and chief of the Material Division,<sup>56</sup> as a brigadier general, and a major general from October 1940.

In 1941, he was sent to Britain to determine how the USAAF could better assist RAF lend-lease requirements (although his chief recommendation would be rejected). Later that year he spent a brief time in the Middle East, but so irritated the British that the Ambassador in Cairo complained to the Foreign Office in London. This led to him returning to the US in December 1941.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, and after a visit to meet Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (accompanied by the British Commander-in-Chief, India, General Wavell),<sup>57</sup> he became Deputy Supreme Commander of the short-lived Arab-British-

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<sup>54</sup> Constituted as the 19<sup>th</sup> Composite Wing in 1929, and activated on 1 April 1931, this Wing deployed to the Canal Zone in January 1933, as part of a major organisational change that saw all USAAC units in the Zone gathered together as the 19<sup>th</sup> Wing/ This unit remained (albeit with name changes) as the major USAAC element in the Canal Zone until creation of the Panama Canal Department Air Force (aka Panama Canal Air Force) and Caribbean Air Force. It became the 19<sup>th</sup> Wing in 1937, and the 19<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Wing in 1940. It was deactivated in the Canal Zone on 25 October 1941, and then reactivated in the US and moved to Egypt, to join the Ninth Air Force in late 1942. Journal American Aviation Historical Society (Spring 1974).

<https://media.defense.gov/2010/Sep/21/2001330256/-1/-1/0/AFD-100921-044.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> The appointment of General "Hap" Arnold as Chief of the Army Air Forces made the post redundant.

<sup>56</sup> The former Engineering and Supply Divisions, its roles at the time involved research and development, procurement, supply, Army aviation procurement, and maintenance.

<sup>57</sup> Over Rangoon, their aircraft was attacked by fighters, forcing an emergency landing, following which the pair were then bombed.

Dutch-Australian (ABDA) Command under Wavell on 1 January 1942, based in Australia and then Java, and by now promoted to lieutenant general.

The ABDA Command soon collapsed<sup>58</sup> in the face of the Japanese attacks, and Brett found himself back in Australia and commanding US Army Forces in Australia. This was when the situation with MacArthur arose, following which Brett returned to the US in his personal B-17 bomber, "*The Swoose*".<sup>59</sup>

In November 1942, he succeeded General Andrews as commander of the Caribbean Defense Command. Although a combat command, due to reductions in both manpower and activity, General Brett would spend much of his time working on political-military relations with Latin American nations – something said to prove fruitful in the longer term.

His time was to be quite different from that of his predecessor, who had been mostly concerned with bringing the new command up to scratch, and fighting for additional resources that were then limited. Indeed, the lack of activity in the Caribbean led to the Command being downgraded repeatedly and restructured several times throughout 1943, with troop levels reduced from then on.<sup>60</sup> It also received much-needed revision of its command structures, which had been found to be confusing, contradictory and inefficient.<sup>61</sup>

When the Command was first established, its importance had seen it placed under Defense Category "D", the highest possible category indicating actual or impending

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<sup>58</sup> It was formally dissolved on 25 February 1942.

<sup>59</sup> Still extant, as the only surviving example of the early B-17D model, and after seeing exhaustive use throughout the Caribbean Defense Command with Brett, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century found it in the hands of the National Museum of the US Air Force, to undergo full restoration. For more on Brett and his *Swoose Goose*, see <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/11/panama-and-world-war-2-general-brett-and-his-swoose-the-b-17-that-lived-for-the-whole-of-world-war-2/>

<sup>60</sup> There was even a study by the Army Staff in 1943 that recommended dispensing with the Command altogether.

<sup>61</sup> For more on the Caribbean Defense Command, see <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/11/panama-in-world-war-2-the-caribbean-defense-command/>

hostilities.<sup>62</sup> In September 1943, Brett was advised that the Command would be reduced to Defense Category A by the middle of the following year. Indeed, on 29 May 1944, the entire region was re-defined as being a “non-combat area”.<sup>63</sup> On 8 June, Defense Category “A” was lifted altogether. In fact, by VE Day on 8 May 1945 no enemy forces had threatened the area at all for over 10 months.<sup>64</sup>

It is said that Brett was quite possibly the one most responsible for turning the Command into what it and its postwar successor commands would become – largely as vehicles for diplomacy and military cooperation with the nations in the region. It is said that Brett’s “*own proclivities for outreach to the local governments*” were a major factor. Brett and his family travelled extensively throughout Central and South America. In the process, it is said that Brett came to understand the area, its geopolitical structure, and its military vulnerabilities.<sup>65</sup>

As well as the *Swoose Goose*, Brett also commandeered a US rescue boat squadron to host fishing parties, and spent so much money entertaining dignitaries that eventually it led to the formal inquiry regarding his spending habits mentioned below.<sup>66</sup>

In November 1944, a training directive included an instruction to assist the Latin American republics in modelling their military into well-functioning units based on the US model. This would go on to become one of the major functions of the US Army in the Canal Zone postwar.

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<sup>62</sup> The stated reason for this was that there had been a real fear of sabotage, revolts, and disorder due to Axis presence within the region at the beginning of the war.

<sup>63</sup> Defense Category A implied that the area or command “would probably be free from attack, but for which a nominal defence must be provided for political reasons in sufficient strength to repel raids by submarines, by surface vessels operating by stealth or stratagem, or isolated raids by aircraft operating chiefly for morale effect”.

<sup>64</sup> All this is somewhat ironic, given that concrete plans for a Japanese attack on the Canal had still been under development during this period – see <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/10/panama-in-world-war-2-the-genuine-threat-the-planned-japanese-attack-on-the-panama-canal/>

<sup>65</sup> <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA459938.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> *A History of the United States Caribbean Defense Command (1941-1947)* by Cesar A. Vasquez (Florida International University, FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations No. 2458, 2016): <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/2458>

In 1945, the Inspector General investigated a series of allegations against Brett regarding the misuse of Army funds and property, dismissing most of them. However, Brett requested voluntary retirement and retired on 30 April with the rank of major general, only to be immediately recalled to active duty the next day as a temporary lieutenant general and reinstated as of the head of the Caribbean Defense Command and Commanding General of the Panama Canal Department.

Finally, in October 1945, he handed over command to Lieutenant General Willis D Crittenberger. After some time in hospital, he returned to the retired status in May 1946, but was promoted lieutenant general on the USAF retired list by Act of Congress in June 1948.

He went on to serve on several committees and Air Force boards, and the President's Service Academy Board between 1949 and 1950, and lived in Florida until his death in 1963 at the age of 77.

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**Lieutenant General Willis Dale Crittenberger**

October 1945–November 1947



2 December 1890 – 4 August 1980

While the war was actually over by the time Crittenberger took over as commander of the Caribbean Defense Command and Commanding General of the Panama Canal Department, he is included for completeness, and to touch on how the Command evolved in the immediate postwar.

He succeeded General Brett (see above), who had, in many ways, established the basis of what the Command and its successors would be in the postwar period.

Crittenberger was born in Baltimore and graduated from West Point in 1909, being commissioned into the US Cavalry in 1913.

During World War 1, he remained in the US, training recruits. Postwar, he progressed along the development route for senior officers, attending the Command and General Staff College in 1925, and the Army War College in 1930. He became increasingly interested in armoured warfare, with posts with a mechanised cavalry regiment, and then chief of staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division during the 1930s, becoming a lieutenant colonel in 1935.

In June 1941, he received a temporary promotion to full colonel, and then became a brigadier general in July. At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was commanding an armoured brigade in the US under General Patton. By February 1942, he was a major general and in command of the division, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division. Another promotion in July saw him a major general, and posted to organise the III Armored Corps in Louisiana. Later redesignated the XIX Corps, this unit deployed to England in January 1944.

He was selected by Eisenhower as one of the three corps commanders for D-Day, but the appointed commander of First Army, General Bradley, replaced these with his own choices, and Crittenberger instead left for the Mediterranean, taking over the IV Corps in Italy in March 1944. After the fall of Rome in June, the Corps saw heavy fighting, being in combat for over 390 days, 326 of them engaged in continuous combat, with German forces in Italy surrendering on 2 May 1945.

In June 1945, he became a temporary lieutenant general (his permanent rank had become brigadier general by June 1946), and on 15 October took over command of the Caribbean Defense Command.



In 1947, he became the first commander-in-chief of US Caribbean Command, successor to the Caribbean Defense Command (and predecessor of present-day Southern Command)<sup>67</sup> under the new US national security plan.

The new Command was reorganised with new goals and responsibilities, and with a major change in mission set - what would eventually become a framework for a postwar hemispheric security system had begun to take shape throughout the mid-1940s, and would extend during the Cold War. The Command was seen as increasingly being of use to combat a communist threat, and this involved not only a military presence, but also diplomatic activity, military training, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. A major role was military training of friendly armed forces in the region, and encouraging military to military cooperation.

Meanwhile, in Panama, Crittenberger revised defence plans, called for a doubling in the size of the airbase at Rio Hato (outside the Canal Zone), and sought the *permanent* possession of several sites (including Rio Hato) outside the Canal Zone.<sup>68</sup> These calls came to nothing, and the Command also saw falling troop numbers - in January 1946, the new Army Chief of Staff, General Eisenhower, informed General MacArthur in Japan that, to make occupation forces available<sup>69</sup> garrisons in the likes of Panama were being "*cut to the bone*".<sup>70</sup>

A long-term plan for defence of the Canal had been approved in July 1946, and Crittenberger had calculated that the annual cost of implementing the plan would be \$11 million, with improvements to bases and installations would be in excess of \$100 million. It would be overtaken by the failure in 1947 to agree a new treaty with

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<sup>67</sup> During the 1950s, defence officials removed the Caribbean basin from the Caribbean Command's area of responsibility; and to reflect these changes, the Kennedy administration changed the name to US Southern Command in June 1963.

<sup>68</sup> Following the Eisenhower-Remón Treaty of 1955, the USAF was to obtain access to Rio Hato airbase (until 1970). All the other sites outside the Canal Zone had been abandoned by January 1948, after the failure of a new agreement with Panama.

Crittenberger had opposed the idea of "joint trusteeship" of bases with Panama.

<sup>69</sup> In Austria, Germany, Japan and southern Korea (not yet South Korea, this being prior to the 1950-53 Korean War).

<sup>70</sup> *Wasting Asset: The U.S. Re-Assessment of the Panama Canal, 1945-1949* by John Major (Journal of Strategic Studies), 2008

Panama over bases outside the Canal Zone.<sup>71</sup> Crittenberger had warned said that such a withdrawal<sup>72</sup> would expose the Canal to the potential of a “devastating” attack.<sup>73</sup>

1950-52 saw him redeployed as commander of the First Army in the US, his military service ending in December 1952 with a ticker tape parade up Broadway.

After retiring, he became a national security advisor to President Eisenhower, served as president of the US Military Academy Association of Graduates from 1955 to 1958, president of the Greater New York Fund, and Chairman of the Free Europe Committee 1956-59.

He died in Maryland in 1980 at the age of 89 and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Ray Todd

Panama City

Republic of Panama

23 December 2025

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<sup>71</sup> Crittenberger singled out Panamanian communists for the events, including large-scale public protests, that led to rejection of the draft treaty.

<sup>72</sup> Specifically mentioning Rio Hato, and the chemical weapons establishment on San José island.

<sup>73</sup> For more on the abortive draft treaty, the subsequent protests, and the US withdrawal from bases outside the Canal Zone, see <https://raytodd.blog/2025/10/10/panama-operating-outside-the-zone-the-1942-agreement-and-the-1947-row/>