

Engineering Heritage Australia

National Engineering Oral History Program

Biographical Notes

L G (George) Redmond (1913 - 2003)

Civil Engineer

Birth & Family: Born 3 October 1913 (Leonard George Redmond), Charters Towers, Queensland. George's family migrated to Australia in c1880s, grandmother from England and grandfather (a medical practitioner) from Ireland. His grandfather was interested in mining and settled in Charters Towers.

Due to George's father's work, the family subsequently resettled in many areas of Queensland, including Cloncurry, Richmond, Innisfail, Townsville and Cairns. His father, (Edward Vernon Redmond, mother, Christina Bell Burness) was a civil and mining engineer trained at Charters Towers School of Mines, later qualified as a shire engineer and worked for several Queensland Shire Councils.

Education: George's early schooling was undertaken by correspondence courses from the Queensland Department of Education. George attended primary school at Richmond and high school at the Townsville Grammar School where he received his Junior Certificate. He matriculated to Queensland University by private tuition. George entered university at the age of 20 and received his Bachelor of Engineering in 1939 as a civil engineer. In the following year he gained his Local Government Engineer Certificate. George became a junior member of the Institution of Engineers during university.

Qualifications: B.E., Civil (Qld)

CPEng

Memberships: M.I.E.Aust

Awards: Royal Humane Society Bronze Medal

Imperial Service Order (ISO)

ACT Engineers Hall of Fame

Work History: George's university work experience included training at the Newcastle Steel Works. During university holidays he also worked at a local technical college manufacturing tools and other engineering materials. George gained additional work experience in local government engineering at various shire councils. His father's engineering skills and variety of work influenced his career choice. After university George joined his father (who worked as a

consulting engineering to shire councils building bridges, roads, water and sewerage facilities; also, his father's tin mine at Cooktown.

George made several attempts to enlist during the early stages of the second world war but due to his 'essential services' work, his applications were rejected. He eventually was commissioned and served as an engineer on several military projects, including the construction of flight training schools, munitions factories and airstrips. In late 1941 he was appointed Resident Engineer for the Torres Strait Islands and sent to Thursday Island. Recently married, his wife, Adelaide Hester Smith, joined him on the Island. As the threats of war in the Pacific increased, most of the civilians (apart from essential services) were evacuated from the Island, including his wife. George remained on Thursday Island for approximately eight months during which time he helped to design and construct a dam on Horn Island to resolve water supply problems and undertook numerous other military related projects. George returned to Townsville where he continued his war service constructing aerodromes, gun emplacements, anti-aircraft stations and radar installations.

In 1944 George was appointed as the Roads and Aerodrome engineer for Queensland with Allied Works Council and he moved his family to Brisbane. Remaining in Brisbane until 1950 as the Senior Civil Engineer, Department of Works and Housing, he was then appointed as the Principal Engineer, Department of Works in New Guinea. His general engineering work and wartime experiences helped to prepare him for the post-war work required to build town infrastructures, including water and sewerage supply facilities, roads, bridges, wharves, houses, hospitals and schools. George worked in New Guinea from 1950 to 1958 and for most of this time was also the Acting Assistant Director of Works. His clients included: Department of Territories, Civil Aviation, Navy, Army, Air Force amongst others, such as the Commonwealth Bank and OTC.

When he was passed over for the position of Assistant Director, George transferred to Canberra in 1958 as Principal Engineer for the ACT Branch of the Department of Works. This was a very active period in Canberra's development and several large construction projects were under his responsibility, such as the Scrivener Dam, Lake Burley Griffin; Bendora Dam (George was particularly proud of his work on Bendora Dam); Commonwealth and King's Avenue Bridges and the Commonwealth Printing Office.

In 1962 (until 1977) George was appointed Director of Works for the Department of Works in Darwin, Northern Territory (the Commonwealth Department had responsibility for works until self-government in 1978). Under his direction the Department was responsible for major urban and rural works such as suburb development, road building programs such as the 'Beef Roads' designed to facilitate the transportation of cattle using large 'road trains' and other major road and bridge work, water and sewerage

supply, town infrastructure including schools, hospitals and public buildings, etc.

One of the many highlights of George's career was the work undertaken by his Department after the devastation of Darwin by Cyclone Tracy on Christmas Day in 1974. Under his guidance the city was restored to a habitable state within a short period of time. His Department was then involved in the reconstruction of Darwin working on 'secondment or as a service to the [Darwin Reconstruction] Commission'. (George Redmond, *In the Eye of the Storm: Darwin's Development, Cyclone Tracy, and Reconstruction*, 2001).

He retired in September 1978 at age 65, 14 months after he returned to Canberra as the Director, Operations in the Central Office of the Department of Construction. (Source: *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 3, NTU Press, 1996)

Although a dedicated and committed public service engineer who traveled to remote and distant places in Australia to achieve a high standard of works and services for the nation, George also found time to raise a family and indulge in several of his favourite sporting and recreational hobbies. Some of which, including golf and game fishing, he excelled in, having received numerous trophies and prizes over the years, especially for his golfing prowess.

Additional Resources:

George Redmond's Northern Territory service story has been recorded for the Northern Territory Archives Service – Oral History Unit. The recordings were conducted over several years by Dr F H (Slim) Bauer from 1988 to 1994. In total there is 12 hours and 55 minutes recorded and transcribed. The topics cover: Works, Housing and Construction (Department of), 1962 to 1977 and Cyclone Tracy and Department of Works.

- Report on activities of the Department of Works until 30th June 1954: with special reference to work carried out during the financial year 1953-54 by L G Redmond. This report is housed in the National Library of Australia and reports on the Department of Works, Papua New Guinea Branch. There is a similar report dating to 1957 held by George Redmond.
- George Redmond's book on Cyclone Tracy: *In the Eye of the Storm: Darwin's Development, Cyclone Tracy, and Reconstruction*, Northern Territory Government, Department of Transport and Works, Darwin, 2001)

Note:

George Redmond turned 90 on 3 October 2003 and at this time was unwell, though able to celebrate this special birthday with family and friends. This interview was conducted on 21 October 2003 and was not completed due to his failing health. George was admitted to

hospital in late November and then to a hospice. His daughter, Lyn Whitlam, was keen to see the interview completed and regularly liaised with the interviewer (M Park) to find a suitable time to conduct the work. Sadly, this never eventuated and the interview only covers George's life and work up until 1958 and his arrival in Canberra. Lyn Whitlam, as Power of Attorney, has completed the interviewee's release agreement as per her father's request. George Redmond died on Sunday, 21 December 2003.

Prepared by Dr Margaret Park, December 2003, from an oral history interview conducted on 21 October 2003 and from the additional resources listed above.